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STAGES THROUGH WHICH THREE STEPMOMS PASSED IN DEVELOPING A MUTUALLY SUITABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR STEPDAUGHTERS

BY

NANCY ANN FOWLER

©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1993

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ISBN 0-315-82060-8

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DEGREE: Master of Education

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: Spring, 1993

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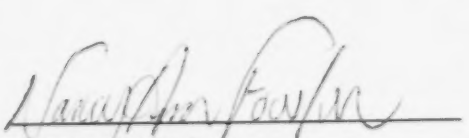

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "STAGES THROUGH WHICH THREE STEPMOMS PASSED IN DEVELOPING A MUTUALLY SUITABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR STEPDAUGHTERS," submitted by NANCY ANN FOWLER in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF EDUCATION in COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY.

Dr. E.D. Sawatzky

Prof. M.A. Bibby

Dr. C. Hobart

DATE: March 23, 1993

This thesis is dedicated

to

Dr. J. Guild

1923 - 1990

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As more divorced fathers opt for continued involvement in their children's lives the dynamics within stepfamilies will alter. One of the individuals most affected by this change is the stepmother. While her arrival into the divorced father's family unit is impactful on his children, research seems to suggest that it is especially significant for his daughters.

Therefore the purpose of this study is to identify, from the stepmothers' perspective those factors that are helpful in the development of a mutually suitable relationship with her stepdaughter.

THESIS ABSTRACT

One child in five under the age of 18 in American society is a stepchild and, by the year 2000, stepfamilies will out number all other types of families (Glick & Lin, 1986). With statistics such as this, it is no wonder that both clinicians and researchers are turning their attention towards stepfamilies.

In our culture, until very recently when a divorce occurred the children were inevitably awarded to the mother. However in the last decade societal changes such as, the participatory level of non-custodial fathers with their children, and court custodial decisions that are more egalitarian, have had significant ramifications in every aspect of stepfamily life and research. One of those most affected by this change is the divorced father's new wife - the stepmother. The role of the stepmother has now become extremely confusing, fluctuating as it does between minimal involvement in some stepfamilies to that of an equal partner in the responsibilities and parental duties of child rearing in others.

Methodologically sound research on stepfamilies has only just begun and research on stepmother families is practically non- existent. The research which has been done seems to suggest that while the arrival of the stepmother into the divorced father's family unit is impactful on all his children, it is especially significant for her daughters. Therefore the purpose of this study was to identify from the stepmother's perspective those factors that seem necessary to develop a mutually suitable relationship with her stepdaughter.

This study was conducted from the qualitative paradigm, using grounded theory as its research methodology. There were three stepmothers who participated in the study. Each was interviewed twice, for

approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. The data were then analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The data seem to indicate that from these stepmother's perspectives, there are three main themes that contribute to the development of a mutually satisfactory relationship between stepmothers and stepdaughters. The first theme is the desire on the part of the stepmothers to develop a 'parent-like' relationship with the stepdaughter. The second is the stepmother's need for the father's support and trust in her interactions with his children. The third theme is the need to filter the relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter through the biological mother. These themes pass through four general stages and vary in significance in each stage. How each theme and the interplay between themes is handled influences the course of action in the next stage. Each course of action has different ramifications for the relationships within the stepfamily. Stage IV appears to be the culmination of the evolutionary processes put into action by the introduction of a stepmother into the father's family unit. It is characterized either by the stepmother reaching a satisfactory relationship in accordance with her goals, or by redefining her goals in accordance with the possibilities that have become apparent to her.

As more divorced fathers opt for greater involvement in their children's lives, the dynamics within stepfamilies will continue to grow in significance to participants and researchers. Custodial arrangements favoring fathers will increase, and more women will find themselves in the role of stepmother. It was my intent to advance the understanding in one of these growth areas, namely the relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people for their help and support in the completion of this thesis.

To the stepmothers who were willing to give so honestly and deeply of themselves regarding their experiences, a special heartfelt thanks. Without your participation this thesis would not have been possible.

To my immediate family, Jim, Jennifer, Duncan, Elizabeth, Alexander, Peter and Caroline, thank you for your understanding, support and patience while I struggled to complete what must have seemed a never ending project. A special thanks to Jim, my partner, who patiently edited many a rough draft.

I would also like to thank my father for his love, encouragement, and belief in my ability and for providing an ethical and moral role model over the years. To my sisters, Daphne, Brenda and Sandra, and their partners, thank you for your love, support, and confidence in me as I strove to complete this thesis. To my stepsisters, Lorri, Judy and Joan, and my stepbrother, Robbie, and their partners, thank you for taking part in the creation of a second family of origin. A very special thanks to my stepmother, Shirley, who took two diverse family units and with love, patience and understanding helped them merge into a large loving unit that had room for all.

Special thanks are due to my committee members: Dr. Don Sawatzky, for his assistance, advice and patience while I worked my way through the labyrinth of qualitative research, Dr. Charles Hobart who was willing to find the time to share his vast knowledge and to direct my first tentative inquiries into the area of stepfamilies, and Mary Ann Bibby, whose direction, encouragement, and unfailing cheerfulness became a lifeline throughout this process.

Finally this thesis would never have been completed without my friends who supported, encouraged, and patiently listened to me over the last few years, to all those special people I would like to express my deep appreciation and love.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter I

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify from a stepmother's perspective those factors that seem necessary to develop a mutually suitable relationship with her stepdaughter.

One child in five under the age of 18 in American society is a stepchild and, by the year 2,000 stepfamilies will outnumber all other types of families (Glick & Lin, 1986). With statistics such as the one above it is no wonder that both clinicians and researchers are turning their attention towards stepfamilies. Yet, remarriage and the formation of a stepfamily is not a new phenomena. In fact the relatively high rate of remarriage that appears in our society today is similar to that which occurred in Europe and America in the 17th and 18th centuries (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). The difference between these two periods lies in the reason for the dissolution of the first marriage. Historically remarriage balanced a family unit after the death of either partner, while today's remarriages are much more likely to occur after a divorce.

In our culture up until very recently when a divorce occurred the children were inevitably awarded to the mother. Only in extreme cases where the mother was found by a court to be "unfit" did fathers obtain custody. Therefore fathers generally were the non-custodial parent and their involvement with their children after the divorce often decreased to the point of being non-existent. In these circumstances if the father remarried the children would acquire a stepmother, however, her involvement in all likelihood would be of a very minimal nature.

In the last decade societal changes such as the participatory level of non-custodial fathers with their children, and court custodial decision that

are more egalitarian, have occurred. This movement by divorced fathers to be more actively involved in all aspects of their children's lives has had significant ramifications in every aspect of stepfamily life and research. One of those most affected by this change is the divorced father's new wife - the stepmother. The role of the stepmother has now become extremely confusing, fluctuating as it does between the minimal involvement from the recent past to the present position of an equal partnership in the responsibilities and parental duties regarding stepchildren (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987). It is no wonder that research indicates that stepmothers experience "more feelings of anxiety, depression and anger regarding family relations than did mothers from intact families" (Nadler, 1976 cited in Santrock & Sitterle, 1987, p. 275).

Methodologically sound research on stepfamilies has only just begun and research on stepmother families is practically non- existent. Thus the choices for research in this area are innumerable. However, of the few studies on stepmother families three (Santrock, Warshak, & Elliott, 1982; Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984; Clingempeel & Segal, 1986) seem to imply that although the arrival of a stepmother was impactful for stepchildren this impact was most significant for stepdaughters. Thus the intent of this study is to follow that lead and, from the stepmother's perspective, identify those factors that occur in the development of a mutually suitable relationship with their stepdaughters.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Deficit-Comparison Model

Methodological Concerns

- Theoretical Orientation
- Sampling Concerns
- Data-Gathering Methods
- Stepfamily Structural Variables
- Stepfamily Complexities
- Interactional Processes

Societal Biases

Post-1984 Empirical Studies

Chapter II

Literature Review

With the increase in divorce and remarriage has come an increased interest by both clinicians and researchers in stepfamilies. These two groups independently explored their own set of variables so that generally information regarding stepfamilies can be divided into two distinct bodies: empirical research and clinical literature (Ganong & Coleman, 1987). Unfortunately until very recently research from both areas was often not very sound. Empirical research certainly prior to the mid-1980's was fraught with methodological concerns and theoretical and sociological biases (Bryan, Coleman, Ganong, & Bryan 1986; Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1984). On the other hand, clinical literature not only had the concerns found in the empirical research but also due to the very nature of its mandate, had to contend with an influence that emphasized the difficulties, complexities and negative affect surrounding stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1986; Visher & Visher, 1979).

However, with the publication of a number of reviews and articles in the early 1980's denoting and discussing these concerns (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987; Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1984; Marotz- Baden, Adams, Bereche, Munro, & Munro, 1979), there has been movement in both the empirical research and the clinical literature toward studies that are more methodologically sound (Cissna, Cox, & Bochner, 1990; Vemer, Coleman, Ganong, & Cooper, 1989; Dahl, Cowgill, & Asmundsson, 1987; Clingempeel & Segal, 1986; Knaub & Hanna, 1984; Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984).

In the empirical research, for example, the use of the deficit-comparison model has either been eliminated (Ambert, 1986; Clingempeel & Segal, 1986; Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984) or

modified towards a more neutral- comparison perspective (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987; Santrock, Warshak, & Elliott, 1982). As well, stepfamily structural variables and complexities are more likely to be addressed and the methodology, while still heavily reliant on the survey method, has moved towards a multi-method multi-source approach (Ganong & Coleman, 1987).

Unfortunately, while clinical literature has shifted moderately from clinical impressions to literature reviews and case studies, clinical writers continue to "seldom . . . explain the sources upon which their information was based" (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, p. 99) and "few . . . [of the intervention programs] have been subjected to rigorous and careful assessment" (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, p. 106). Thus, within the clinical literature there are major methodological issues that still need to be addressed and few, if any, reliable studies on the relationship between stepmothers and stepchildren.

Of the two paradigms available for this literature review, it is the empirical research done after 1984 that provides both the more methodologically sound research and, studies that deal specifically with the interactional patterns between stepmothers and stepchildren. Therefore, although this present study will originate from a qualitative methodology, the literature review will focus on post-1984 empirical studies with an emphasis on those studies dealing with the relationship between stepmothers and stepchildren.

However, doing so negates approximately 25 years of research in the study of stepfamilies; dismissing such a large body of available data warrants some explanation. Therefore, prior to continuing this present review, a discussion of the factors that led to the decision to focus on post-1984 work will be addressed. These factors include the use of the

deficit-comparison model, methodological concerns, and societal bias regarding stepfamilies.

Deficit-Comparison Model

The general research paradigm within the area of stepfamilies and, for that matter, other non-traditional families, has until recently functioned primarily from a deficit-comparison perspective (Ganong & Coleman, 1984; Lamb, 1982). Within this paradigm the nuclear family either explicitly or implicitly functions as the norming standard for all other family types. The underlying premise of this model is the assumption that variation from the norm in family structure will produce adverse effects on members within that structure -- especially children (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, 1986; Marotz-Baden, Adams, Bereche, Munro, & Munro, 1979).

In relationship to stepfamilies, the deficit-comparison model emphasizes their problems and ignores the possibility that stepfamily relationships may be qualitatively different from intact nuclear families (Clingempeel, Brand, & Segal, 1987; Visher & Visher, 1979).

Thus the deficit-comparison model, through its adherence to a comparison perspective, not only obscures the researcher's view of the broader possibilities within the field of investigation, but also influences the direction of the research, the interpretation of the data and the conclusions drawn (Ganong & Coleman, 1987, 1986, 1984).

Methodological Concerns

A number of independent reviews were done on the empirical research in the 1980's (Esses & Campbell, 1984; Ganong & Coleman, 1984, 1986, 1987). It was the methodological flaws outlined in these articles that strongly influenced both the delineation of studies for this present review and more importantly, the methodological approaches subsequently used by researchers in this field. These independent reviews identified a number of

fundamental methodological issues such as the theoretical orientation used, sampling concerns, data-gathering methods, stepfamily structural variables, stepfamily complexities and the identification of processes within stepfamilies. Each of these concerns will be briefly discussed below.

Theoretical Orientation

As indicated above, the use of the deficit-comparison model was prevalent in the research prior to 1984 (Ganong & Coleman, 1984). The underlying assumption within that paradigm was that children raised in a stepfamily would be adversely effected (Marotz-Baden et al., 1979). On reviewing the empirical literature up to 1984, Esses and Campbell (1984) found that "the focus chosen by many stepfamily researchers and practitioners indicates a bias, sometimes subtle and at other times explicit, of viewing the stepfamily as deviant and pathogenic in comparison to traditional, first-marriage families" (p. 416). Ganong and Coleman (1987), while agreeing with Esses and Campbell's perception of the pervasiveness and negative effect of implementing the deficit-comparison model extend the argument and comment on the consequences to the research when this perspective is used. They state that "This orientation is not conducive to assisting either clinicians or researchers in asking questions that will broaden understanding of stepfamily dynamics, identify stepfamily strengths, and improve clinical practice . . . " (p. 97). Therefore, the recognition of this fundamental flaw within the deficit-comparison model was one of the first steps toward sounder methodological research within stepfamilies.

Sampling Concerns

In discussing the sampling procedures in the studies up to 1984, Esses and Campbell (1984) conclude that the "samples used have been small, often

nonrandom and unrepresentative in that the focus has largely been on white middle-class stepfamilies" (p. 415). Ganong and Coleman (1984, 1986) also identify similar concerns regarding the sample size, the use of nonprobability sampling techniques, lack of information regarding sampling procedures, and "the dearth of cautions regarding limits to concluding and generalizing from such samples" (p. 404). They conclude that "small samples reduce the power of statistical analysis, obscure differences in stepfamily structures (by lumping different forms together or by eliminating stepfamily forms) and limit researchers ability to generalize from their data . . ." (p. 404). Thus, the results of the pre-1984 studies must be viewed with skepticism.

Data-Gathering Methods

In addition, these reviewers (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, 1986, 1987; Esses & Campbell, 1984) criticized the early research for its general reliance on a single data gathering method, usually a survey which was frequently administered to only one member of the stepfamily. This questionnaire was often subjectively designed by the investigator (Duberman, 1975; Bowerman & Irish, 1962; Bernard, 1956) and has not been adequately standardized against an appropriate norming group, i.e., similar stepfamily units.

The consequences of implementing these subjectively derived tools were that meaningful comparisons between studies were virtually impossible, conflicting observations could not be clarified, and findings could not be readily generalized to the population as a whole (Ganong & Coleman, 1987).

Stepfamily Structural Variables

One of Ganong and Coleman's major criticisms of the research conducted up to 1984 was "that researchers generally have failed to consider variables critical to understanding differential effects of stepfamily

structures on children" (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, p. 402). Some of these variables are: the reason for the dissolution of original family, age of child at disruption of parents' marriage, age at remarriage, length of time in a single- parent family, length of time in stepfamily, custody residence of stepchildren, stepsiblings, half-siblings, and contact with non- custodial parent. They go on to state that, "limited assessment of family structural variables severely hinders the development of understanding of the effects of parental remarriage on children" (p. 402) and this reviewer would add, all interactional processes within stepfamilies.

Stepfamily Complexities

In a similar vein to the criticism regarding the lack of awareness of family structural variables, is the failure to account for the complexities between types of stepfamilies. In its simplest conception, there are three types of stepfamilies with children: stepfather-mother families where there is a biological mother and a stepfather, stepmother-father families where there is a biological father and a stepmother, and complex stepfamilies where both adults are stepparents. While it seems obvious to us now that at least some of the interactional patterns within these stepfamilies would be unique, research in the past has classified and discussed all stepchildren regardless of their stepfamily configuration. It is important to note that this probably occurred due to the small number of stepmother- father families and complex stepfamilies. The unfortunate consequences of this lack of methodological clarity was that conclusions which were basically drawn from stepfather families were generalized to all other types of stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1984).

Interactional Processes

The need to reach beyond the investigation of simple structural variables in stepfamilies was noted by both Esses and Campbell (1984) and

Ganong and Coleman (1984, 1986, 1987). However, their methods for achieving that goal varied. Ganong and Coleman (1984) agreed with the recommendations put forth by Marotz-Baden et al. (1979) to explore the "social interactional dynamics that lead to a given outcome within a stepfamily" (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, p. 403), while Esses and Campbell (1984) proposed a focus which would investigate the "different developmental phases and tasks" (p. 416) that stepfamilies encounter. In spite of the difference in orientation to this problem, both approaches acknowledged the need to develop studies that would address the complex processes that occur in stepfamilies.

Having highlighted the deficit-comparison model and the methodological concerns surrounding the research, the third fundamental concern, societal biases is discussed below.

Societal Biases

The third major concern regarding the research prior to 1984 is the influence of sociological biases on the subject, the methodology and the investigators.

While it is this reviewer's belief that sociological biases are in varying degrees a factor in research, it is important to periodically review past findings with a view to assessing the societal influences that helped create them.

In a 1985 article Kay Pasley and Marilyn Ihinger-Tallman analyzed the presentation of stepfamily life in popular literature between 1940 and 1980. Over that time a change occurred in the number and tone of the articles. There were only ten articles in the 1940's and 1950's. They portrayed stepfamily life in an "optimistic or romantically optimistic" (p. 531) manner. In the 33 articles published in the 1960's a pessimistic tone appeared which

left "the reader with little hope for the survival of the newly formed family" (Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1985, p. 531). By the 1970's the number of articles had doubled and a more factual and neutral tone prevailed.

If one connects the prevalent social attitude towards stepfamilies in the 1960's with Ganong and Coleman's 1984 review of the empirical research, it is interesting to note that the three studies that found significant differences in favour of nuclear families were all conducted between 1960 and 1965 (Rosenberg, 1965; Langner & Michaels, 1963; Bowerman & Irish, 1962) and all used, as their theoretical orientation, the deficit-comparison model.

The question then becomes, did the sociological biases of the day unduly influence these three studies and if so, did this influence affect the field as a whole?

It seems appropriate to answer these questions by selecting and analyzing one of the studies above. The Bowerman and Irish (1962) study was chosen due to the dominant and influential position it has held, until very recently, in the general field of stepfamilies research (Nolan, Coleman, & Ganong, 1984).

This study was comprised of two surveys conducted in 1953 (n = 4,685) and 1960 (n = 23,552) on approximately 29,000 junior and senior high school students resident in Washington, North Carolina and Ohio. Ninety percent of the students were white and Protestant was the most frequently cited religious affiliation. The ratio of mother-stepfather families to father-stepmother families was approximately four to one. A scale was developed "to measure the adjustment and orientations of the respondents to each of their parents" (Bowerman & Irish, 1962, p. 115) or stepparents. The scores were grouped into high, medium or low adjustment categories. From the data, Bowerman and Irish (1962) concluded:

> that homes involving step-relationships proved more likely to have stress, ambivalence, and low cohesiveness than normal homes. The

> reactions of adolescent children indicate that stepmothers have more difficult roles than do stepfathers, with the consequent implications for interactions within the family. Stepdaughters generally manifested more extreme reactions toward their parents than did stepsons. The presence of stepparents in the home affected also the adjustment of the children to their natural parents, usually somewhat diminishing the level of adjustment. (p. 121)

Generally, there are three ways in which societal influences can bias a study: the subjects, the methodology, and the researcher. In the Bowerman and Irish study, we can only speculate on the influence the societal biases might have had on the students. However, Pasley and Ihinger-Tallman (1985) indicate that the cultural climate regarding stepfamilies in the late 1950's and early 1960's was extremely negative. It seems probably that this atmosphere would have permeated through to the junior and senior high students and thereby have influenced their responses.

The second point of entry is the methodology used by an investigator. In this case, it has been observed that the survey used by Bowerman and Irish was "specially constructed for stepfamily constellations but lacking adequate testing for reliability and validity" (Esses & Campbell, 1984, p. 416). It is questionable whether researchers immersed in a negative cultural milieu and functioning from the deficit-comparison model could develop a relatively bias free survey.

Finally, perhaps the strongest evidence for a societal bias in Bowerman's and Irish's (1962) study appears in the language used throughout the article. Terms such as "real parents" (p. 116), "real fathers and mothers" (p. 116), "normal homes" (p. 117), "prefer the real parent" (p. 119) indicated a bias on the part of the researcher and therefore, developed, maintained and perpetuated biases in the reader. This bias, apparent in the

language of the Bowerman and Irish 1962 study more than likely influenced the interpretation and conclusions drawn from the data. If this supposition is true, then this negative sociological bias through the centrality of the Bowerman and Irish study influenced the direction and tone of research on stepfamilies between its publication in 1962 and its wane in popularity in the mid-1980's.

Having highlighted the three factors: deficit-comparison model, methodological concerns and societal biases that led to the decision to delete research prior to 1984 from this present study, exploration of empirical studies on stepmother-child relationships from 1984 to the present is in order.

Post-1984 Empirical Studies

Due to custody preferences that favor the biological mother and methodological flaws, valid empirical research in the area of stepmother-stepchild relationships has been practically non- existent (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987). However, in the last decade a number of studies were conducted that attempted to address this issue from a multi-method perspective (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987; Clingempeel & Seal, 1986; Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli, 1984; Crosbie-Bennett, 1984; Santrock, Warshak & Elliott, 1982). Each of these studies are briefly discussed and their findings stated below.

In 1982, Santrock, Warshak and Elliott conducted a multi-method study on social development and parent-child interactions in father-custody and stepmother families. This study not only explored the effects of father-custody families on children using direct laboratory observations but was one of the first to address the child's previous place of residence and his or her relationship with the custodial parent as significant factors in the

formation of a stepmother family. Santrock et al. (1982) are extremely clear on how their father-custody families were formed. In their study these families were not formed because the mothers were found by the courts to be "unfit" but rather because the ex- spouses "either did not care whether they had custody, were actively opposed to it, or were convinced that the children would be better off with the other parent" (p. 292). Although clear on this critical factor, Santrock et al. (1982) are vague on others such as the age of the child at separation, length of time in father-custody family, length of current marriage and whether the stepmother has children of her own and their place of residence. Although the lack of information on these specific factors is unfortunate, this study is in many other ways a pioneer in more appropriate methodological procedures. Therefore the findings are discussed below albeit with some reservations.

In the first half of the Santrock et al. (1982) study, they investigated the child's social behavior and parent-child interaction in father-custody, mother-custody and intact families. Their general finding was that "competent social behavior is more characteristic of children whose custodial parent is the same sex as they are" (p. 296), for example, "father-custody boys shows more competent social development than [father-custody] girls" (p. 306) and "sometimes the interactions suggests more socially competent behavior by mother-custody girls compared to mother-custody boys" (p. 298). These findings seem to "favor a same-sex-child-custodial-parent family structure" (p. 302). However Santrock et al. (1982) hasten to state that these findings are mediated by a number of factors such as the parenting style of the custodial parent and the support system available to that parent.

Using the same measurements and procedures Santrock et al. (1982) then compared children's social behavior in 12 stepmother families, 20 father-custody families and 20 intact families. They found that "boys are

likely to show less competent social behavior in stepmother families than girls in stepmother families and boys in father-custody families" (p. 311). Furthermore, "boys from stepmother families were less affectionate" and "less sociable with their fathers than boys in single parent father- custody families" (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987, p. 276).

Santrock et al. (1982), speculated that the improvement in social behaviors on the part of girls, with the arrival of a stepmother may be due to their now having "a same-sex 'parent' who understands (their) needs and with whom (they) can identify" (p. 311). This research seems to imply that boys from father-custody families find the arrival of a stepmother particularly disruptive.

Another possible speculation for the above pattern of interactions may be the development of different bonding patterns between custodial father-son and custodial father-daughter during the duration of the father-custody family.

In 1987, Santrock and Sitterle conducted a study that focused on parent-child relationships in stepmother families, stepfather families and intact families. The children were from white middle class families and one child between the age of 7 to 11 was the target child. Families were also matched on the parent/stepparents education and socioeconomic status. Generally the recommendations put forth by Esses and Campbell (1984) were implemented in this study.

Along with the above information, it is important to note that "the children in stepparent families were about 3 1/2 years old when their parents separated, and about 6 years old when their custodial parent remarried" (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987, p. 279). The average length of the current marriage for the stepparents was 3 years and generally the custodial parents waited 2 years before remarrying. Santrock et al. (1987) did not

identify in this study the process by which the custodial father retained custody following the divorce. Generally what they found was that the remarried fathers in this study appeared to be:

> "highly competent parents." They had good father-child relationships and carried a fair share of the weight in responding to their children's emotional, social, and physical needs. These fathers felt very positive about their relationship with their children and those feelings were reciprocated by their children. (p. 290)

At the same time, however Santrock et al. (1987) also found these remarried fathers felt "less confidence in the rearing of their daughters" (p. 286).

Although "stepmothers felt more confident in the parenting of their stepdaughter" (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987, p. 286) and shared "many of the parental and childrearing activities with their husband(s)" (p. 291), they were viewed by their stepchildren as "somewhat detached, unsupportive and uninvolved in their lives" (p. 291). A view, stepmothers also came to share regarding their relationship to their stepchildren.

Interestingly, Santrock et al. (1987) also found demographic variables such as the complexity of the stepfamily, step- procreation, total number of children in the household and family income, to be related to "the child's self-worth and the quality of parent-child relationships" (p. 292) in stepmother families.

In 1984 Clingempeel, Brand, and Ievoli did a multi-method - multi-measure - multi-source study on the relationship between stepparent and stepchild in stepmother and stepfather families. The goal of the study was "to describe the characteristics of stepparent-stepchild relationships in stepmother and stepfather families" (p. 467).

Sixteen stepmother and 16 stepfather families who meet the following criteria were selected:

(a) "one or both spouses were currently in a second marriage and the previous marriage was dissolved by divorce;

(b) both spouses were under 45 years of age, had a minimum of a high school education, and a total annual income of at least $15,000;

(c) the present marriage was 6-24 months old;

(d) only one spouse had custody of children from the prior marriage, of which one child was 9 to 12 years old; and

(e) there was no children from the current marriage

(Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984, p. 467).

Other characteristics such as the stepparents' age, stepparents' formal education, length of parents' previous marriage, length of time as a single parent and length of current marriage were also obtained.

Basically they found that "stepparent-stepdaughter relationships in both stepmother and stepfather families were more problematic than stepparent-stepson relationships" (Clingempeel, Brand, & Ievoli, 1984, p. 471). This finding seems to contradict Santrock, Warshak and Elliott's 1982 study where girls become more sociable competent with the introduction of a stepmother. However the low scores on Love and higher scores on Detachment recorded by stepdaughters seems to support the finding in Santrock and Sitterle (1987) that stepchildren view their stepmothers as "detached, unsupportive and uninvolved in their lives" (p. 291).

Clingempeel et al. (1984) suggest that the conflict in findings between this study and the Santrock study may be related to the fact that it is unusual for fathers to receive custody of their children and that circumstances relating to that decisions might be effecting the data.

Clingempeel and Segal (1986) investigated the quality of the stepparent-stepchildren relationship and the stepchild's psychological adjustment in four stepfamily types: stepmother-stepson, stepmother-

stepdaughters, stepfather-stepson, and stepfather-stepdaughters. The subject recruitment, methods and measurements were similar to those used in the Clingempeel et al. (1984) study discussed above.

Not surprisingly Clingempeel and Segal (1986) found that "more positive stepmother-stepchild relationships were associated with better psychological adjustment of stepchildren of both sexes that the results were more striking for stepdaughters" (p. 481).

Unfortunately Clingempeel and Segal (1986) did not identify either the elements of this positive relationship or how the positive or less positive relationship between stepmother- stepdaughters developed. In an extensive search of the empirical literature the only article that discusses the type of interactions that leads to positive stepmember relationships was a study done by Crosbie-Bennett (1984) on stepfather families. This study found that "the establishment of mutually suitable steprelationships between a stepfather and his stepchildren had a greater effect on family happiness than did the quality of the marital relationship" (p. 462). They go on to state that a mutually suitable steprelation "must be defined according to the desires and needs of each stepmember" (p. 462).

Perhaps it is the existence or nonexistence of this particular relationship that is contributing at least in part to the variety of findings in the area of stepfamily research. If so the identification of processes that might be common to the development of this mutually suitable relationship would be a useful tool in both the research and counselling of stepfamilies.

Both the nature of this question and the embroyonic state of the research on stepmother families requires a research approach that is inductive and exploratory rather than deductive and verifiable (Stern, p. 1980). Just such an approach is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter III

Methodology

Background to Qualitative Inquiry

- Common Themes of Qualitative Inquiry
- Issues in Qualitative Research
  - Credibility of the researcher
  - Credibility of data collecting and analysis
  - Generalizability

Bracketing

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Chapter III

Methodology

Chapter three describes the research paradigm and process. For those readers who are less familiar with qualitative research the chapter opens with a brief description of the common themes and the major research issues that underpin the qualitative paradigm. Next the issue of bracketing is addressed from both a theoretical and personal perspective. The chosen methodology is Grounded Theory which is described briefly from the theoretical perspective. The constant comparative method is the main technique used in Grounded Theory. In the section title Current Study the basic steps of this method are discussed from both the theoretical perspective and then as they were applied in this study. This chapter closes with an introduction to the participants.

Background to Qualitative Inquiry

Common Themes of Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research has its origins in the phenomenological paradigm. This paradigm offers a way of understanding and studying reality which is fundamentally different from the traditional logical-positivist paradigm. While there are a variety of philosophical and theoretical perspectives that have contributed to the phenomenological paradigm, there still remain certain common themes that run through a qualitative inquiry. Patton (1990) identified ten of these themes. They are:

1. Naturalistic inquiry: Studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges--lack of predetermined constraints on outcomes.

2. Inductive analysis: Immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships;

begin by exploring genuinely open questions rather than testing theoretically derived (deductive) hypotheses.

3. Holistic perspective: The whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies not meaningfully reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships.

4. Qualitative data: Detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; direct quotations capturing people's personal perspectives and experiences.

5. Personal contact and insight: The research has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; researcher's personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon.

6. Dynamic systems: Attention to process; assumes change is constant and ongoing whether the focus is on an individual or an entire culture.

7. Unique case orientation: Assumes each case is special and unique; the first level of inquiry is being true to, respecting, and capturing the details of the individual cases being studied; cross-case analysis follows from and depends on the quality of individual case studies.

8. Context sensitivity: Places findings in a social, historical, and temporal context; dubious of the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space.

9. Empathic neutrality: Complete objectivity is impossible; pure subjectivity undermines credibility; the researcher's passion is understanding the world in all its complexity--not proving something, not advocating, not advancing personal agendas, but understanding; the researcher includes personal experience and empathic insight as part of the relevant data, while taking a neutral nonjudgmental stance toward whatever content may emerge.

10. Design flexibility: Open to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change; avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness; pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge.

(Patton, 1990, p. 40)

The phenomenological research paradigm has given rise to an extensive and often heated debate around the validity, reliability and generalizability of this type of research. These issues are addressed below from the phenomenological perspective.

Issues in Qualitative Research

In conducting any type of research there are always questions regarding validity, reliability, and generalizability that must be addressed. Because of the fundamental difference in perspective between the two paradigms qualitative researchers have developed a different understanding, meaning and language for these terms. However at the present time there is not one set of qualitative terms regarding validity, reliability and generalizability that is consistent for all qualitative research. This lack of consistency can lead to confusion. Therefore rather than trying to address these issues from a number of qualitative researchers, I have chosen for the sake of clarity to discuss them through the language of one qualitative researcher, M. Patton.

Patton (1990) in his book Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods links validity and reliability with credibility. Thus for Patton if a study is credible it is also valid and reliable. Patton saw a credible study as one that attended to the following components:

1. "the credibility of the research which is dependent on training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self; and" (p. 461),

2. "rigorous techniques and methods for gathering high-quality data that is carefully analyzed with attention to issues of validity, reliability and triangulation; and" (p. 461),
3. "philosophical belief in the phenomenological paradigm that is a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis and holistic thinking." (p. 461)

In relationship to this study only the first two points will be discussed in detail. The third, the belief in the phenomenological paradigm has been briefly addressed on pages 21 to 23.

Credibility of the researcher. "The credibility of qualitative inquiry is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and the centre of the analytic process" (Patton, 1990, p. 461).

In the above quote, Patton declares the critical significance of the researcher to a valid study. To obtain an appropriate degree of credibility the researcher must address where appropriate the following four factors:

1. First Factor:

"Reaction of program participants and staff to the presence of the evaluator" (p. 473)

1a. Possible Researcher's Response:

"Long term observations that permit an initial period during which evaluators and the people in the setting being observed get a chance to get used to each other" (p. 473).

2. Second Factor:

"Changes in the evaluator (the measuring instrument) during the course of the evaluation--that is instrumental effects" (p. 473).

2a. Possible Researcher's Response:

"The important point is to record these changes. Field notes, introspection and conversations with informants and colleagues provide the major means of measuring this dimension" (p. 475).

3. Third Factor:

"The predisposition or biases of the evaluator" (p. 473).

3a. Possible Researcher's Response:

"All the procedures for validating and verifying data analysis...are aimed at reducing distortions introduced by evaluator's predisposition" (p. 475); and the researcher must "report any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis and interpretation--either negatively or positively in the minds of users of the findings" (p. 472).

4. Fourth Factor:

"Evaluator incompetence (including lack of sufficient training or preparation)" (p. 473).

4a. Possible Researcher's Response:

"There are no simple formulas or clear-cut rules about how to do a credible high quality analysis. The task is to do one's best to make sense out of things...and to return to the data over and over again" (p. 477).

Through the suggestions above a researcher from the qualitative field anchors his/her study in a credible manner.

Credibility of data collecting and analysis. The second process through which credibility is developed and maintained in a qualitative study is by rigorous data collecting and analysis. One major process for strengthening a qualitative study is through triangulation. Triangulation is the "combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena or programs" (Patton, 1990, p. 187).

There are four basic types of triangulation. They are:

1. Methods triangulation: "checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection methods [i.e. qualitative data, and quantitative data.]" (Patton, 1990, p. 464).

2. Triangulation of Sources: "checking out the consistency of different data sources within the same method" (Patton, 1990, p. 464). Patton (1990) suggests four ways to validate data through triangulating data sources:

> comparing observational data with interview data; comparing what people say in public with what they say in private; checking for the consistency of what people say about the same thing over time; and comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view. (p. 467)

3. Analyst Triangulation: "using multiple analysts to review findings" (Patton, 1990, p. 464). There are a number of ways of achieving analyst triangulation, for example: "using several interviewers"; "having two or more persons independently analyze the same qualitative data"; or "have those who were studied review the findings" (Patton, 1990, p. 468).

4. Theory/perspective triangulation: "using multiple perspective or theories to interpret the data" (Patton, 1990, p. 464).

Thus through the implementation of triangulation a researcher "can guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source or a single investigator's biases" (Patton, 1990, p. 470).

As well as the process of triangulation Patton suggests two other techniques for strengthening a qualitative study. He recommends that the researcher search out "negative cases" because "our understanding of [those] patterns and trends is increased by considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the pattern" (Patton, 1990, p. 463). The second technique occurs during data analysis. Patton (1990) suggests that validity can be

strengthened by having "the evaluator-analyst" (p. 462), contemplate alternate or "competing themes and explanations" (p. 462) for the data.

Finally Patton (1990) concludes that "the ultimate test of (the) credibility...is the response of information users and readers to that report" (p. 469). Patton calls this "face validity" (p. 469).

Generalizability. The final qualitative issue to be addressed in this study is the question of generalizability. Can the findings of this study be generalized to other situations or individuals? The answer is yes, but only if one considers generalizability through the assumptions underlying a qualitative study.

Generalizability like validity and reliability has been reconceptualized and renamed by a number of qualitative researchers. For example, generalizability has been redefined by Stake (1978) as a naturalistic generalization. Generalization for Stake and other qualitative researchers is a guide rather than a predictor. Basically knowing something well gives rise to the ability to find similarities in other situations. The general can be found in knowing the particular.

Cronbach and associates (1980) suggest that a study be designed to permit not generalizability but "extrapolation" (p. 231-235). According to Patton (1990) "extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar but not identical conditions" (p. 489).

From the data above, it appears that the question of generalizability in a qualitative study is still very much an evolving issue for those within the qualitative paradigm. Since the methodology of this particular study is based on grounded theory, it seems appropriate to leave the final word regarding generalization to that perspective. Basically generality as defined by quantitative researchers i.e., "the external criteria of adequacy derived

from a random sampling of a large number of individuals" (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 147) is not a major focus for qualitative researchers. Grounded theorists' main objective is to "create new theory ... not to verify the theory so generated beyond the verification yielded by saturation of categories. Additional verification is deliberately left to subsequent studies" (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 147).

The focus of the grounded theorist is to create a theory that is rooted in the phenomena being studied. While acknowledging the limitations this perspective places on generalizability, they believe that the gains made in staying close to phenomena far outweigh the loss in generality.

Bracketing

Theoretical Perspective

In the section titled, Common Themes of Qualitative Inquiry, the term "empathic neutrality" was defined by Patton (1980, p. 41). This process is similar to that of 'bracketing' and is defined as a position in which the researcher takes a "neutral nonjudgmental stance towards whatever content may emerge" (Patton, 1980, p. 41). This perspective is neither easy to acquire nor to maintain. The researcher must "become aware of and deal with selective perception, personal biases, and theoretical predispositions" (Patton, 1980, p. 56). Certain techniques have been developed to help the researcher obtain this stance. They were described in the sections titled Credibility of the Research and Credibility of Data Collecting and Analysis. Below is my personal attempt at bracketing or obtaining an empathic neutrality. This process continued throughout the life of the study.

Self Bracketing of the Researcher

My mother died when I was in my mid-twenties leaving my father with four daughters between the ages of twenty to twenty-six. Approximately a

year and a half later, my father remarried a widow with four children (a son and three daughters) between the ages of thirteen to twenty-three. Although I had not been living at home for a number of years, I still had to deal with a variety of conflicting emotions.

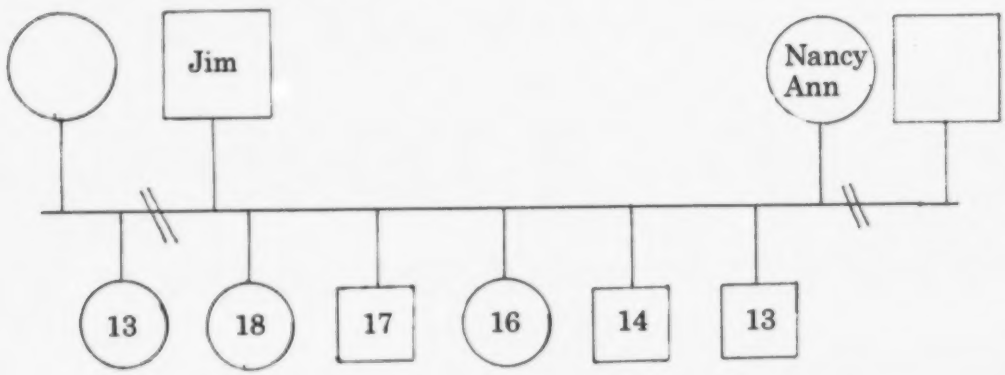
Over the last 17 years I have watched my stepmother integrate two very distinct family units into a loosely knit larger one. This was neither a quick or easy task. From my own perspective within this family I see a basic acknowledgment of biological ties among the two sibling groups. However, individuals within these two groups have formed different levels of connectedness with each other. Not only are there different levels of intimacy among the stepsiblings but these levels seem open to change over time. Interestingly, just as the degree of connectedness between siblings and stepsiblings is set by the individuals in that relationship, so too is the relationship between stepparent and stepchild a function of what the individuals within the relationship desire.

Generally there seem to be certain words such as trust, respect, empathy, consideration, generosity, and flexibility that come to mind when I reflect on my own stepfamily experience. Clearly this experience in relationship to my study is a double edged sword. On one hand I believe that it enabled me to understand and emphasize more readily with the stepmothers in my study. On the other, I needed to be aware of the biases that those experiences created in me and to diligently monitor their possible effects on the research.

As well as my family of origin influences I must also attend to influences arising out of my present family situation. During the interviewing processes my own single-parent status changed. Jim, the gentleman I had been dating for four years was transferred to the city. We decided to co-habit. Since I have three children (ages 17, 15, 11), Jim

became a stepfather. While my children were used to having this man in their lives on a part-time basis, a full-time live-in stepfather was definitely different. Needless to say, there was a lot of renegotiating going on at home. While some of the issues that arose between Jim and I regarding my children was echoed in the information obtained from the stepmoms, I was not aware of issues from home influencing the interviews.

This situation continued for eleven months during which time I finished interviewing and was well into data analysis. At that point Jim's sixteen year old daughter and a month later his 14 year old son came to live with us. Once again the family dynamics were in flux. Our present family looks like this. This diagram and those that follow in the Introduction to the Stepmothers at the end of Chapter III are based on a process called genograms that was developed by Monica McGoldrick and Randy Gerson (1985). Further clarification of the symbols used in these tables can be found in Appendix A.



As well as the influence of my own lived experience there is the influence acquired during the research of the relevant literature. Some grounded theorists handle this particular influence by not "reading pertinent literature until the investigation is finished" (Rennie, Phillips, &

Quartaro, 1988, p. 141). However, this was not the approach taken here. Instead I chose to highlight the thoughts and ideas that arose out of the literature review by stating them below in a question format.

1. Does the current and past relationship of the child to the custodial and noncustodial parents affect the type of mutually suitable relationship that develops between stepmother- stepdaughter?

2. Do the circumstances surrounding the father retaining custody of his children influence the type of relationship that develops between stepmother-stepdaughter?

3. Does the age of the child at separation of parents and the length of time in a father custody family influence this relationship?

4. Do children at different developmental stages seem to develop different types of mutually satisfactory relationships with their stepmother?

5. Is the establishment of trust and affiliation in the steprelationship a major ingredient in stepfamily integration?

6. Are mutually suitable steprelationships the cornerstone to healthy functioning stepfamilies?

7. How are negative emotions handled in a stepfamily?

It was my expectation that by starting my research with a clear statement of my known biases and preconceptions and by continued judicious monitoring of those assumptions, through memoing, introspection, and conversations with colleagues, I would reflect the processes of my participants more clearly.

Grounded Theory

In 1967 Glaser and Strauss developed a research methodology called Grounded Theory. This approach allowed them to investigate complex human interactions where the factors contributing to that behavior had not

yet been identified. It is just such a situation that is confronting this study and therefore the use of grounded theory here seems most applicable.

Grounded Theory is based "on the generation of theory through the inductive examination of information" (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 141). This approach is anchored in a philosophical perspective that emphasizes the discovery of the propositions of a theory rather than the verification of an existing theory's constructs.

Thus Grounded Theory uses data gathered in an inductive manner to identify meaning units. These are then combined based on similarities to create descriptive categories. Linkages between categories are explored and categories with numerous connections are incorporated under a more general construct category heading. Eventually one or more core categories emerge which describe the fundamental process that is occurring in the situation under investigation. Hypotheses regarding the linkages between categories become the foundation of the emerging theory. Finally these hypotheses can later be tested on different sample populations, either through another grounded theory study, or a more deductive quantitative theory.

The Constant Comparative Method

The main method used in Glaser's and Strauss' Grounded Theory (1967) is the constant comparative technique. There are six general steps within this method. They are; data gathering, memoing, open-categorizing, the identification of a core category, memo sorting, and theory development and writing. These steps, are not linear in nature but rather many of them operate simultaneously. This constant movement among the steps is directed by the information being processed. The main goal of this technique is to identify the critical factors that are occurring in the situation under

investigation. Participant selection and these six main steps are discussed below from both the theoretical perspective and the actual application in the study.

Current Study

Participant Selection

Rennie, Phillips, and Quartaro (1988) suggest that "in order to maximize the chances that aspects of the phenomenon will emerge clearly ... participants [be] selected who seem likely to represent the phenomenon" (p. 142). In a similar vein Patton (1990) suggests that the researcher "select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 169).

Based on these directives, pragmatic considerations and the literature review three criteria were established in this study for selecting the stepmothers. They were:

1. minimum of one year in the steprelationship;
2. divorce was the cause of the previous marriage dissolution;
3. the stepmother's involvement with her stepdaughter was significant and meaningful to the stepmother.

With those criteria in mind a number of avenues were used to try to contact eligible stepmothers. Two moderately large social service agencies who offered parenting workshops for blended families were approached. An information sheet (Appendix B) regarding the study was given to the participants in those classes in the hope that they might volunteer. Only one stepmother contacted me through the social service agencies and she unfortunately did not meet the study's selection criteria. Two of the stepmothers were notified of the study through a mutual friend. These two stepmothers individually initiated contact with me. The third stepmother

was suggested to me through a mutual acquaintance. I then contacted her. All three stepmothers met my research criteria. In total three stepmothers participated in this study. Each stepmother was interviewed twice for approximately 1.5 to 2 hours.

Data Gathering

There are a number of different methods and techniques used in collecting qualitative data. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. The method used in this study was an open-ended interview. It was chosen because it "maintain[s] maximum flexibility so that information could be pursued in whatever direction seemed appropriate" (Patton, 1990, p. 281) and because "questions can be individualized to establish in-depth communication" (Patton, 1990, p. 282). These qualities seemed essential in an area where research is extremely limited. However Patton (1990) identified three possible areas of weakness in using the open-ended interview method. These areas are:

1. "requires a greater amount of time to collect systematic information because it may take several conversations with different people before a similar set of questions has been posed to each participant,"

2. "is more open to interviewer effects in that it depends on the conversational skills of the interviewer and,"

3. "data obtained from informal conversational interviews are also difficult to pull together and analyze."

(Patton, 1990, p. 282)

With this knowledge in mind, the stepmothers who had been identified as possible participants of the study were contacted by telephone. At that time, the purpose, procedures, time commitment, and confidentiality of the study was explained. If the stepmothers were still interested, a time was set

up for the first interview. To maximize the stepmothers' sense of comfort, the interview sites were chosen in accordance with the stepmothers' wishes. In this particular study, one stepmother chose to be interviewed in her home, another in her office, and the third in the researcher's office. Since all the interviews were to be taped, a consent form (Appendix C) regarding taping was obtained at the beginning of the first interview. At this time I also explained that quotes would be taken from the transcript to explain and clarify processes or categories. However, the stepmothers were assured that any identifying names or features in the quote would be removed or altered to protect their confidentiality.

During the first interview open-ended questions such as, "Could you tell me how you became a member of a stepfamily?" were used to establish rapport and to gather general information regarding the formation of the stepfamily. As the interview progressed more specific questions, such as "Can you recall an event that seemed to change or influence your relationship with your stepdaughter" were generated. As the data was analyzed tentative factors became apparent. These factors then influenced the direction of future questions. This process by which the emerging data analysis influences the criteria used to gather future data is one of the most salient features of grounded theory.

A second interview was scheduled with all participants. These interviews had two major functions. Firstly, they allowed the participants the opportunity to read the transcripts and my preliminary analysis of it. It was at this point that any errors or misunderstandings regarding what was said, or meant, by the participant could be rectified. This step is crucial for the development of a valid study. Further, a second interview allowed me the opportunity to access other incidents that may have occurred to the stepmother between interviews. The interviews were as long as the stepmothers needed to tell their stories.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Memoing, open-categorizing, and the identification of a core category or categories, are three of the six steps in the constant comparative technique. They are the central processes in data analysis. Each of these steps is discussed below from the theoretical perspective and the practical application within the study.

Memoing. From the beginning to the end of the study the researcher's thoughts, biases, hypotheses, hunches regarding the categories and their possible linkages were recorded through a process called memoing. Memoing facilitates the researcher 's ability to keep track of her speculations and the particular data that stimulated them and helps the researcher monitor her thoughts and feelings. Basically, this process is " designed to tap the initial freshness of the analyst's theoretical notions and to relieve the conflict in his thoughts " (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967, p. 107). Because these memos originated directly from the data, they help keep the theory rooted in the data which is one of the fundamental premises of grounded theory. Later, these notations become crucial to the conceptualization of the emerging theory.

I found, as Glaser and Strauss had stated, that memoing was central to every aspect of this study. From the early moments of the conception of the topic, to finding and interviewing the participants, through the agonizing process of data analysis, to the development of an interpretation, memoing was the glue that held the total process together. It is impossible to describe all the memos noted over the last year and a half. However, since this process is so crucial in the development of a qualitative study, samples of my notations are presented below.

Thursday, Nov., 21/91 Interviewed my first stepmother; Laurel. I am nervous. She asked to be interviewed outside her home. Did interview in

the evening, in an office on campus. Laurel spoke rapidly-is that normal for her or was she nervous? One particular incident made her cry. Interview lasted about an hour. I felt there was a rapport between us. Sent tape to typist for transcription immediately.

Tuesday, Dec. 3/91 Interviewed second stepmom; Mary. Still nervous. Maybe I should have had a formal interview format? Am aware that the data from the first interview is now present in my mind. Are issues that seemed important to the first stepmom going to also be important to the second stepmom. For example- Loyalty, Discipline, Nurturing? Should I raise these issues if they don't come up? Arrived at Mary's house at 1:15 A.M. Her husband, Richard arrived home at the same time and joined us while he had lunch. Interview was delayed. I wondered if he was "checking me out." He stayed for at least a half an hour. He works at home. I wonder if he effected the interview. Near the end of the interview the stepdaughter, Susan arrived home. I felt frustrated. Mary is a clear, direct and thoughtful communicator and I felt there was more I could have gotten. Thanked Mary and reminded her of our second interview. Took tape to typist.

From Dec. 4/91 to Dec. 13/91 Reading and thinking about Laurel's and Mary's tapes. Are there common activities that the stepmoms engage in: mothering, intimacy, discipline? Is the degree of her involvement in any of these activities determined by her relationship with the father? Where does trust come in to the process?

Friday, Dec. 13/91 Interviewed third stepmom, April. This interview took place in the stepmom's office. I was nervous. April appeared relaxed. Rapport was easily established. April recalled issues that obviously caused her pain. Took tape to typist and took the rest of the month off.

By the first week in January I had all three first interviews and I was in the process of analyzing each. Even at this early stage there were ideas, hunches, and speculations regarding possible commonalties between the three stepmothers' processes. Below are a few examples of the memos from each participant and of those early speculations regarding their commonalties.

Saturday, Jan. 22/92-Laurel's transcript. Do these women come in to the established unit with the expectation of being a parent? What are the factors that influence their becoming a parent? Personality of stepmom and her background? Personality of father and his situation? Whether the father is willing to let/support stepmom in parenting role? The type of involvement maintained by the biological mother with the children?

Friday, Jan. 24/92-Laurel's transcript. Critical incident- Stepmom fights with the father, Tom for the right to be a real person in relationship to her stepdaughter, Ann.

Thursday, Jan. 30/92-Laurel's transcript. There seem to be different levels of being a parent. OK to be the good mother, however this doesn't equate to a real parent. Does Laurel believe that to be a real parent she must have the right to discipline and be angry with her stepdaughter?
Is the first critical incident for all three stepmoms going to revolve around discipline?
It seems as if all aspects of interacting with the children have to be negotiated through the father. Some of these are done so smoothly that no one seems to notice. Others are more difficult - discipline.
Finished analyzing Laurel's transcript I feel high, confused, and happy.

Wednesday, Feb. 5/92-Mary's transcript. Mary talks about "equal love and loyalty" between herself, her husband; Richard and the stepchild, Susan. What is her role? Is there a process to becoming a real parent that entails the active permission of the father; the working through by the stepdaughter of loyalty issues between biological mother and stepmother; and finally the stepmother confronting the stepdaughter on a significant issue? Notice that Mary does not attempt to discipline until the stepdaughter comes to live with them. By this time she has established a bond with her stepdaughter.

Friday, Feb. 7/92-Mary's transcript. Is Mary's process any different than Laurel's? Perhaps the apparent difference has more to do with the fact that Mary's stepdaughter did not live with them for the first sixteen years while Laurel married a man who was the primary care giver of three young children. Are the processes the same and it is just the time frames that they occur in, that are different? However, the stepmother's personalities seem quite different. What difference would that make if the time frame had been constant.

Thursday, Feb. 13/92-Mary's transcript. There seems to be stages in the building of this relationship: the 'good-mother' or earth mother; then a critical incident occurs that calls for a change in behavior on the part of the stepdaughter and the father.....and then what? Mary established a loving relationship with her stepdaughter before she asked for a change. The request for change apparently was no issue for the stepdaughter but did need to be worked through by the father. What was that about?

Monday, March 23/92-Mary's transcript. It appears that fathers are willing to let the stepmothers be the "good mother" but have real difficulty allowing the stepmoms to confront, discipline, or be angry with the stepdaughter. Trust seems to be the issue here.

Wednesday, April 8/92-Mary's transcript. Back to the stages that seem to be evolving: wanting to be part of the family - the dream; being the nurturing stepmom - the good mother; the critical incident, asking for change - issues of loyalty, love, trust; response to request for change affects family development - here the three stepmoms start to follow different paths.

Friday, April 10/92-General thoughts. I am aware that I am very involved with the stories of each of my stepmoms. I have noted my feelings and will try to be aware of them on the second interviews. I am also wondering what type of therapy would be most helpful to stepfamilies.

Saturday, April 11/92-April's transcript. At first April is thrilled to be a part of father's family. It seems that though she wants to belong, all decisions regarding the children are made by the biological parents no matter whose house they are in? Maybe that's why boundaries seem so crucial to April.

Tuesday, April 14/92-April's transcript. April is not allowed to nurture, to make decisions, or to discipline her stepchildren [Elizabeth and Peter]. Her response to this exclusion was at first to fight for a place - not supported by father (Bob). April starts to create boundaries - first to try create space for the stepfamily members to grow - not supported by the father; than to protect self. She sees herself becoming like an aunt.

Saturday, April 25/92-April's transcript. April's activities with the stepchildren seem to be dictated by the biological parents.

Tuesday, April 28/92-April's transcript. Is loyalty in the spousal relationship a determinate of the stepdaughter/stepmother relationship? What are the behaviors that build loyalty? Are love and trust properties of loyalty?

Friday, May 1/92-Mary's transcript. It is interesting the effort Mary goes to, not to infringe on the relationship between the biological parents and their daughter. Later this position seems to cause a misunderstanding between Mary and her stepdaughter re: belonging in the stepfamily.

By the end of June, I had done my second interviews and started analyzing them. The memoing process continued in much the same vein as above.

Open-categorizing. Generally raw data is analyzed into "meaning units" (Rennie, Phillips, & Quartaro, 1988, p. 142). Based on their similarity of meaning these units are clustered into categories. One of the strategies that can be used at this stage is open-categorizing. In open-categorizing, meaning units can belong to more than one category. This strategy allows the researcher maximum flexibility in the early stages of the study. While this strategy was available to me, it was implemented only rarely in this study.

Identification of core categories. Having identified a number of similar meaning units a heading needed to be assigned. Generally, the heading or name of the category is at first descriptive and is based on the language of the participants. As more data is analyzed the researcher finds that "some categories are defining characteristics or properties of other categories" (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 143). These defining categories are then amalgamated under a construct category. Construct categories originate from the researcher and are used to "explain the descriptive categories and the relationship among them" (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 143). During the process of data analysis a hierarchy within the data emerges: from meaning units, to descriptive categories, to construct categories, to the emergence of core categories. These core categories describe the fundamental process that was occurring in the area of study.

While the process above was used as a model for identifying one or more core categories, the data dictated significant differences in the analytical approach. Following the first step of Rennie et al. (1988) similar meaning units were grouped together. However, deciding what type of title to give these clusters differed from Rennie's procedure. If the information was purely factual, for example: demographic information or custody arrangement, the data was clustered under a construct heading immediately. It was my opinion that factual data was presented by the participants in a concise, clear manner and did not need clarifying through any research process. If the data was more complex, for example: thoughts, feelings, opinions, or emotions, then a descriptive category was used. The participants' first transcripts were analyzed using these procedures.

At this point, I came to a very interesting crossroads in the analysis. I could continue using the model of Rennie et al. (1988) and hopefully identify one or more core categories, or acknowledge and follow another pattern that was clamoring to be recognized from within the data. This pattern seemed to be comprised of stages for example: certain attitudes and behaviors were discussed by all three participants in the early life of a stepfamily. I began to wonder if there were other stages; which factors might propel a stepfamily from one stage to the next; and whether there were common core categories in each stage?

Because this pattern originated in all three participants' data, it became strong enough to direct the data analysis. Based on this awareness I took a different approach to the analysis. I tried to organize the data by stages. It appeared that the stages could be identified by critical events which separated them. These critical events appear in all three stepfamilies in the first two years. Thus stage one and stage three ended with a critical event. As the data from the three participants continued to be organized into

stages, it became apparent that there were similarities in behaviors and attitudes in all stages. However those similarities were strongest in the first two stages.

It also became apparent that each stage had a major theme or core category and that movement into the next stage was determined by a certain minimum resolution of a critical event, which inevitably contained elements of the core category. If that minimum criteria was not met the stage was revisited. While it was the stepmother who precipitated these first critical events, the second critical events were more likely to be precipitated by another stepfamily member. It became apparent through the analysis, that after a certain amount of time movement from a stage does occur even without the minimal resolution noted above. However, without that minimum resolution, the process and outcome for the stepfamily was different.

Chapter IV deals extensively with the presentation and interpretation of the data. What I would like to present here is how I organized the data into stages. I will use the data from only one stepmom to illustrate this process. The same process was used on all other transcripts received from the stepmoms.

Laurel's transcript. As noted above, the identification of a critical event in the first two years of each of the stepfamilies' lives was central to the decision to consider analyzing the data from a stage perspective. At this point, however, no firm commitment had been made to this approach to the analysis, rather this was an exploratory look at the data. The first step was to analyze the data surrounding these critical events in all three cases. Below is an example of the analysis surrounding Laurel's critical event.

Laurel's Transcript

Stage II / Table I

Critical Incident

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
The two youngest were sleeping with him. So every night there was a kid in bed with him. When I came over and if we sleep together he'd put the kids in to their own bed.		Critical event; Kids sleeping with dad.	Setting the scene.	Stage II
This is a treat for them and they're not getting it any more because I am here I'm depriving them of something.		Stepmom interprets present situation as possibility for children to perceive her as a problem.	Stepmom's rationale for change.	Stage II
So I told him first; I think it's better for the kids to be sleeping in their own beds. I want you to change this and explained why.		Stepmom requests change because she does not think it is good for the kids to be sleeping with dad.	Request for change by the stepmom which involves the stepdaughter.	Stage II
It did not happen, it did not happen.		Dad's response to request for change.	Dad's first response to the request for change.	Stage II

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
O.K. you've got a choice here. I'm quite clear that I am not putting up with this. You take care of this or I'm gone. This was the only time I've given the man an ultimatum.		Stepmom gives Dad an ultimatum. Either you change this, or I leave.	Stepmom's ultimatum.	Stage II
So he did (make the change), but boy he did not like it. The ultimatum pissed him off for years.		Dad's reaction to stepmom's ultimatum.	Dad's response to stepmom's ultimatum.	Stage II

Each stepmom's critical incident was analyzed in the above manner. From that analysis three facts became apparent. First, there were similarities between the requests. Secondly, there were differences within the critical events. Thirdly, there was a difference in the relationships within the stepfamily before the request and the relationships within the stepfamily after the requests. The third factor allowed me to organize stage one. Below is an example of the analysis of stage one from Laurel's transcript. Many of the meaning units and categories presented were found in all three participants' transcripts.

Laurel's Transcript

Stage I / Table II

The Beginning

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
We started going out together just about seven years ago.		Demographic information.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
Marrying five years after we started going out.		Demographic information.	Ditto	Stage I
Their dad's still angry about that and made it plain at the time that he was angry and did not try to pretty this up.	Father was angry regarding the divorce.	Father's reaction to the divorce.	Relationship between father and ex-wife.	Stage I
He's a very nurturing man, he's very involved with his kids, very, very dedicated to being a father, a parent.	Dedicated, nurturing father who is actively involved in parenting.	Father's attitude and behaviors regarding parenting.	Relationship between father and children.	Stage I
The children have primary residence with him and go to mom's every other weekend and one night a week.		Custody arrangements.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
Dad is very, very dedicated to being a father, a parent, sometimes I think too dedicated.	Stepmom's perception of father/child relationship as she entered the unit		Father/child relationship at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I've never had my own kids so I was kind of interested in really being a part of the family and of the kids.	Stepmom's motivation for level of involvement with kids and stepfamily.	Stepmom's World	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
From the start I was quite strongly involved with the kids.	Stepmom's level of involvement with kids at onset of the relationship.	Stepmom's early interactional pattern with stepchildren.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren.	Stage I
I think my integration into the stepfamily was helped by the fact that there were five nannies.	Father's child care solution helped the integration of the stepmom into the unit.	Factor that helped stepmom integrate into stepfamily.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I talk it over with a friend at work.		Stepmom's support system.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
Without my training I might not of been able to stay in the relationship because it was so painful.		The importance of the stepmom's education to her ability to stay in the stepfamily.		Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
I am a much more direct person, probably more energetic probably more irascible.		Stepmom's personality.	Factors that are present at the beginning of development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I think that I am primarily assertive.		Stepmom's personality.	Factors that are present at the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I insisted on respect from the beginning, that's part of who I am.		Stepmom's personality.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I would take something on; head on.		Stepmom's personality.		Stage I
I helped them with life choices. I helped them with their homework. I was there in their home. I'd shop sometimes for them and with them. I'd sew their clothes, talk to them about their pain, the kind of things any mother does.	Activities that stepmom engaged in, in the role of a stepmom. These activities were perceived by her to be the things that any mother would do.	Mothering activities.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren.	Stage I
I taught those kids to show appreciation.	Stepmom tries to teach certain values.	Stepmom as teacher.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren.	Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
I am trying to teach them that people can be different and still get along.	Stepmom tries to teach certain values.	Stepmom as teacher.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren.	Stage I
In terms of having me emotionally close to the kids, I remember Dad quite consciously encouraging me to do things with the kids, and even exclude himself sometimes so I could bond with them.	Dad fosters the development of a bond between stepmom and his children.	Father facilities relationship between stepmom and stepchildren.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren is facilitated by the father.	Stage I
The stepchildren made me a Mother's Day card and said I did a lot of mothering for them all.	Stepchildren are able to see the stepmom's activities as mothering.	Stepchildren acknowledge mothering.	Relationship between stepmom and stepchildren is acknowledged by the stepchildren.	Stage I
I had only been going with their dad about a year when my stepdaughter called me a mother figure. She said "You're like a cross between a mommy and an aunt."	Stepdaughter acknowledges stepmom as a type of mother. Tries to label that mothering.	Stepmom as a type of mother.	Relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
My stepdaughter is such a thoughtful kid. I worry about her; that she's trying too hard to make people like her.	Stepmom is concerned about her stepdaughter's developing personality.	Example of stepmom as a mother.	Relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage I
If they were not in much contact with their mother then loving me might have been difficult because they'd feel disloyal. Their mom being in the picture has been an asset to me.	Stepmom perceives biological mother's involvement as helpful for her in developing a relationship with the stepchildren.		Relationship between stepmom: stepchildren and the biological mother.	Stage I
I think that if mom weren't in the picture; if they felt rejected or abandoned by her: they would work that out on me, testing me. They don't have to. Mom's there.	Stepmom perceives biological mother's involvement as helpful for her in developing a relationship with the stepchildren.		Relationship between stepmom; stepchildren and biological mother.	Stage I
They were easy kids to love. They are loving kids, open hearted kids, and their parents made them that way by loving them a lot. Some of it is just plain luck. They happen to like me. Some of it is who I am.	Stepmom's perceptions of the factors that contributed to the building of her relationship with her stepchildren.		Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
I am a pretty decent person. My training helped and the length of time we had to get used to the situation.			Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage 1
Our relationship had a lot of ups and downs. Dad's a very strong guy. You have to be a very strong cookie yourself to argue with this man.		Relationship development between stepmom and dad.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
There are tons of negotiations and lots of them go smoothly, but every once in a while there's one of those markers and we fight it out.	Negotiations and fights.	Relationship development between stepmom and dad.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
I do have to get very clear with that man. Part of it is the male female dynamics. He perceives me as trying to dominate him and he will dig in his heels. Then the kids' issues get lost.	Male, female dynamics and their effect.	Relationship development between stepmom and dad.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
Their mother and I are a lot alike. We share a lot of the same interests and values I think my stepdaughter is quite comforted by that.	Stepmother can see similarities between herself and the biological mother. This is a comfort to the stepdaughter.	Similarities in values and interest between stepmom and biological mother.	Relationship between stepmom; stepdaughter and the biological mother.	Stage I
His identity as a person is very much attached to being a father.	Being a father is central to this man's concept of self.	Father's personality	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
He's a very funny man.	Father has a good sense of humour.	Father's personality.	Ditto	Stage 1
Father Bear, Papa Bear.	Stepmom perceives father as very protective.	Father's personality.	Factors that are present at the beginning of the development of a stepfamily.	Stage I
We're both very strong personalities.		Stepmom's and father's personalities.	Ditto	Stage 1

Having analyzed some of the data to form the above two stages, it was time to consider whether or not the rest of the data could also be organized into a stage format. The data for Stage III suggests that the type of outcome from the critical incidents or the requests for change at the end of Stage II, strongly influences the nature of the interactions in the next stage. Since each father responded differently, the consequences for the stepfamilies were different. However, even with these differences there were common themes.

It became apparent that Laurel and April, who were unhappy with the fathers' response to their request for change, initiated new requests. These stepmothers seem to be seeking "something." The type of relationship that they developed with the stepdaughter and the father seemed to be dependent on gaining this "something" from the fathers.

If, in Stage II the stepmother received what she was looking for from the father, the relationship between herself and the stepdaughter seemed to develop in a mutually satisfactory direction. However, if the stepmother did not receive what she needed from the father, the stepmother recycled the request for change through the stepfamily again. Laurel was one of the stepmoms who recycled this first request. Therefore the next step in Laurel's process was the analysis of this second attempt at this first request for change. It is in this second attempt that the data reveals what Laurel was seeking from the father. Since the second attempt was similar in nature to the first request, they were discussed together in Chapter II.

Stage III dealt with relationship developments between members within the stepfamily and the biological mother. These relationships were developed through certain common issues. These become apparent in the analysis.

Laurel's Transcript

Stage III / Table III

Issues in Relationship Development

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
Dad's afraid of his own anger.		Dad's fear of his own anger.	Father's own personality.	Stage III
I have never hit those children, never will. He has hit them.		Stepmom would never express her anger physically.	Stepmom's personality.	Stage III
I'd settled something, with the oldest stepson and dad did not realize it. He hit him.		Issue around disciplining the stepson.	Discipline as an issue between stepmom, stepson and father.	Stage III
I'm so aware that I did not want to undermine dad, that I did not step in.		Stepmom's fear of undermining dad.	Undermining as an issue in the stepfamily.	Stage III
I probably should of tried to step in. It would have been difficult. He was so angry.	On reflection stepmom thinks she should have stepped in even if dad was angry.	Stepmom reflects on past interactions in the stepfamily.	Learning from the past.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
This situation was quite early in the relationship and I was not sure of myself.		Early in the relationship. Stepmom unsure of her position.	Stepmom unsure of her role in stepfamily in early stages.	Stage III
It's been hard for him to trust me, and he says he does. But it's a struggle for him when the kids are hurt and I'm dealing with them.		Stepmom's perception of dad's struggle to trust him with his kids.	Dad's struggle to trust stepmom in her interactions with his kids.	Stage III
It's only with anger and discipline that he really gets scared. To watch me do it still tears him apart because he still thinks they're fragile little creatures.		Dad is afraid to let stepmom discipline the children. He is afraid that his children will get hurt.	Dad's fear of stepmom's anger or discipline in relationship to the stepchildren.	Stage III
He's ok when I nurture them.		Dad's ok with stepmom nurturing them.	'Good-mother' ok with dad.	Stage III
He did tell me once that he was as also torn at those times. He cares about me and he sees how the kids jerk me around. So he sees my pain and his kids pain.		Dad has torn loyalties between stepmom and his children.	Dad's loyalty conflict.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
I think it's their dad I need to trust more.		Stepmom realizes she needs to trust dad more.	Stepmom's development of trust in dad.	Stage III
There was something I had to take care of regarding how his daughter was speaking to me.	Stepmom wants to talk to her stepdaughter about an issue.	Recycling the request for change.	Setting the scene for the request.	Stage III
In the course of things he intervened and undermined me and that made it really painful.		Dad undermines stepmom in her interactions with the stepdaughter.	Dad's response to recycled request for change.	Stage III
Being undermined is not a position that I would accept as a stepmom.		Stepmom will not accept being undermined as a stepmom.	Undermining as an issue in the interactions in the stepfamily.	Stage III
I was quite clear with him on about that. This is my condition of marriage: support me, including making mistakes with the kids.	Stepmom wants dad's support, even when she is making mistakes as a condition for marriage.	Stepmom's request for dad's support; even when she makes mistakes with the children.	Factors that the stepmom perceived as essential from the dad for marriage.	Stage III
You have to trust me. If you are not ready to trust me, don't marry me.	Stepmom demands trust from dad.	Stepmom asks for dad's trust.	Factors that the stepmom perceived as essential from the dad for marriage.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
Look it, not only do you have to trust me with your children, you have to stand back while I make mistakes with them. You've got to support me, me not the children, even if I'm hurting them.		Stepmom asks for trust and support from the father in her interactions with his children.	Factors that the stepmom perceived as essential from the dad for marriage.	Stage III
That was hard for him, but he agreed.		Dad found this difficult to do.	Difficult for dad to do.	Stage III
The acknowledgment that a parent, a natural biological parent isn't perfect, makes mistakes and things go on and work out, helped him to agree.		Biological parents make mistakes and kids survive. So dad rationalizes that the kids will survive a stepparent making mistakes.	Dad's rationale for meeting stepmom's request.	Stage III
I had enough faith in their dad and myself and the kids that things will get stronger.		Stepmom believes that the relationship between herself, the kids and dad will get better.	Stepmom's faith in the members of the stepfamily.	Stage III
But in terms of how dad has supported me, he's done better than I thought he would.		Stepmom is surprised at how well dad has supported her.	Dad supports stepmom; to her surprise.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
I taught my stepdaughter to drive. I took her to get her learner's (permit). I took her for her test and we have that bond. That was a bond and special for the two of us.		Stepmom took the time and energy to teach her stepdaughter to drive. This created a special bond.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
So I taught her knowing, figuring, watching her and figuring out how she needed to learn. I gave her those experiences.		Stepmom considered stepdaughter's learning style and then taught her with that in mind.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
Her appreciation was nice and her acknowledgment that I was a really good teacher for her.	Stepdaughter recognized and acknowledged her stepmom's effort.	Stepdaughter acknowledges stepmom's efforts.	Relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
I know that all three of them respect me. She can trust me, in any dimension. To be honest, to care about her, to chose wisely about what confidences to divulge and letting her know. Trusting me to have her best interest at heart		Respect, trust, caring, honesty, and love are some of the elements that the stepmom can identify in her relationship with her stepchildren.	Elements in the stepmom/ stepdaughter relationship; Respect, Trust, Honesty, and Love.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
even if I am going against her. There's love between us, it's shown in everyday life. We enjoy each other. We're a lot alike.		Ditto	Elements in the stepmom/ stepdaughter relationship; Respect, Trust, Honesty, and Love.	Stage III
Sometimes we are so much alike I cannot believe you're not my daughter.	Stepmom is astonished by the similarities between herself and her stepdaughter.	Bonding on the part of the stepmom towards the stepdaughter.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
Like we're both chatty, I talk a lot, she talks a lot, we both enjoy a lot of the same things. So I feel very connected to her in the kind of person we are. We share a lot of values.	Because of those similarities the stepmom feels very connected to her stepdaughter.	Bonding on the part of the stepmom towards the stepdaughter.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
My stepdaughter said pretty clearly, now these are not her exact words, but it basically boiled down to, "I don't want to be like you, I think you're too aggressive". She was afraid of being as 'head on' as I am.		Stepdaughter perceives stepmom as aggressive and rejects that for herself.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
That was painful, it did hurt because of course I don't see myself as an aggressive person.	Stepmom does not see herself as aggressive and is hurt by stepdaughter's perception of her.	Stepmom is hurt by stepdaughter's perception.	Further relationship development between stepmom and stepdaughter.	Stage III
It's painful to see her modelling herself after her mother, who's supposedly the earth mother, smoothing over things and then knifing people, and she doesn't see the knives. She can only see the wonderful things and then she thinks that I'm aggressive. So I found that painful.	Stepmom perceives her stepdaughter modelling herself after her biological mother. Stepmom believes that the stepdaughter does not fully understand her mother's personality. Stepmom is hurt by stepdaughter's lack of understanding.	Stepmom struggles with biological mother's influence on the stepdaughter.	Relationship between stepmom, stepdaughter, and biological mother.	Stage III
I think these kids have the edge over a lot of kids, because they've got four adults to use. They've got these four people to learn different styles from: to accept or reject.		Stepmom perceives that belonging to a stepfamily gives the stepchildren four adult models to observe.	Stepmom's perceptions of the strengths of a stepfamily; four adult role models.	Stage III

Meaning Units	Descriptive Category	Concrete Category	Core Category	Stage Theme
The family has a lot of openness, like they don't always have to think the same.		Freedom to think differently.	Stepmom's perceptions of the strengths of a stepfamily; the freedom to think differently.	Stage III
I think that the stepfamily relationship with the kids can only be good if the parents' relationship is good and solid.		Good marital relationships leads to healthy stepfamily relationships.	Stepmom's perceptions of the strengths of a stepfamily; strong marital relationships.	Stage III
Often the issues around the kids will boil down to things about the other parent. You've got to be able to settle those, or it comes out at the kids.	Parental issues can get hidden in the interactions surrounding the stepchildren. Parental issues need to be settled or the kids suffer.	Importance of the strong marital relationship to the health of the stepfamily.	Relationship between the dad, the stepmom and the stepchildren.	Stage III

Above is a comprehensive description of the process of analyzing the data up to Stage III. Stage IV consist of the second major critical incident and it's ramifications on the relationships and interactions between members of the stepfamily, as well as the relationships and interactions with the biological mother. Since, Stage IV was analyzed in the same manner as the previous stages, it is not included here.

Memo Sorting, Theory Development and Writing

Having finished analyzing and organizing all the data, the next step in the study is the development of a theory. In the constant comparative method Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified a strategy called memo sorting as a preliminary process for theory development and writing.

In memo sorting all the memos made during the study are sorted and considered in relationship to the core category, connections within the core category, and existing relevant theories. During this process new ideas are generated which are then transferred on to additional memos. Thus, "the meaning system provides the organizational structure for the write-up of the theory" (Rennie et al., 1988, p. 145).

Within my own study, the process noted above was generally followed. Memos, that touched on how the data might organize itself into a theory, were reread. Some were no longer applicable, others were compiled into rough ideas and thoughts regarding a possible theory. These possible theories were discussed with members of my committee and other colleagues. Gradually, a theory emerged that took into consideration the data, other existing theories, and the knowledgeable input of supervisors and colleagues. That theory now, only needed to be written.

Surprisingly, the theory, or as I prefer to call it, the model emerged after the completion of Chapter IV, relatively easily. I can only speculate

that having organized, analyzed, and agonized over the data for the last year and a quarter, the model itself had already taken shape in my mind long before I wrote it. It is presented at the beginning of Chapter V.

The last step, but certainly not least, to be discussed in the design of this study is the ethical concerns. They are presented below.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality of the participants was safeguarded by keeping the tapes, consent forms, and any other identifying documents locked in a desk drawer until the thesis was completed. At the termination of the study all the tapes and documents will be destroyed. When using quotes for the data any identifying characteristics such as names or geographical locations were removed or altered. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Ethical Review Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology.

As well as the confidentiality concerns I was aware that focussing on the relationships within the stepfamily had the potential to disturb the stepmother or her interactions with other stepfamily members. While my own background in counselling was helpful in recognizing and handling these sensitive issues, it also caused a conflict for me regarding which role, researcher or therapist, to assume. This problem was resolved by providing information on agencies and therapists that offered support to blended families, to those participants who indicated the desire to know.

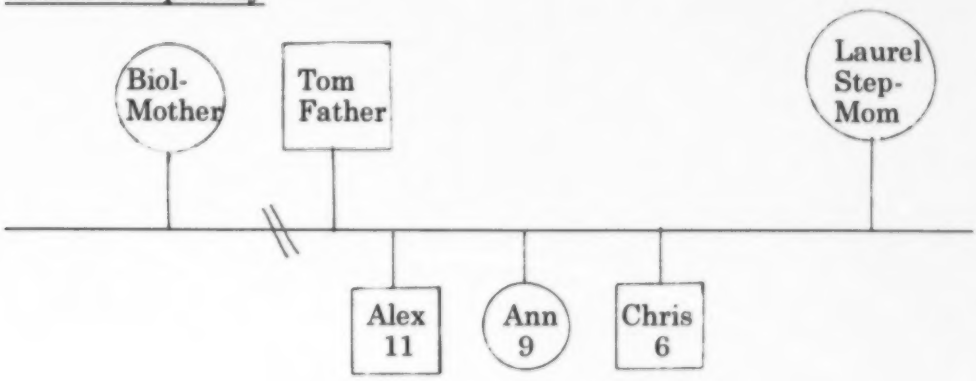
Due to the fact that some of the participants indicated an interest in the findings, a summary of the model was compiled and sent to all participants.

The purpose of this section of Chapter III was to present to the reader both the theoretical bases and the practical application of this study. Having completed that objective, the final section in this chapter is an introduction to the stepmother. It follows.

Introduction to the Stepmoms

Three stepmoms volunteered to be participants in the study. The information below was gleaned from their respective interviews. It contains factual circumstances regarding the formation of their stepfamily and the stepmoms' view of themselves.

Laurel's Stepfamily



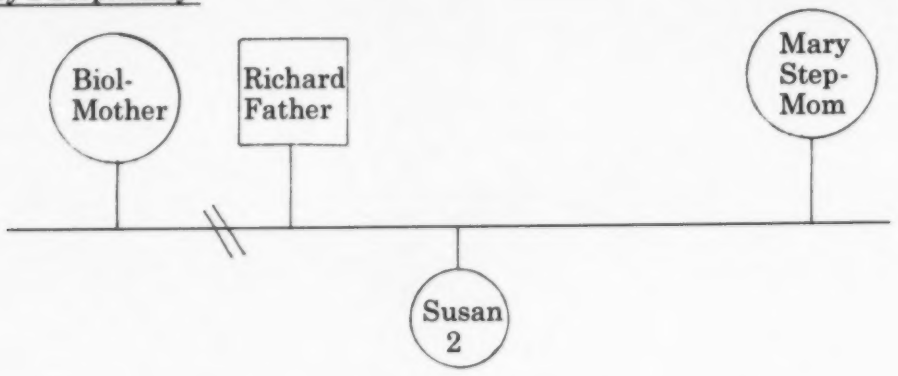
* See Appendix A for symbol comprehension.

Laurel has a full-time career in one of the helping professions. She met Tom, her husband, at church. He had been separated for a year before this. Tom had three children from his prior marriage. Their ages were, Alexander 11, Ann 9, and Chris 6, when Laurel first met them. Tom's children have always had primary residence with him. Right from the beginning of her relationship with Tom, Laurel found herself "strongly involved with the children." Laurel had not been married before and did not have any children of her own. Tom and Laurel dated for two years and presently have been married for five.

Laurel describes herself as "energetic", "strong" and "direct." She states that she "tackles things head on" in an "assertive manner." She likes to "talk about things that upset her" directly with the people involved. In

relationship to the stepchildren as well as with others, she sees herself as being "trustworthy...having the step-children's best interest a heart" and "honest--they can count on me for honesty." Laurel, in her interactions with the stepchildren "insists on respect." She, perceives the stepfamily as having a "lot of openness" a place where people "don't always have to think the same."

Mary's Stepfamily



* See Appendix A for symbol comprehension.

Mary met Richard through work. They dated for a year and then married. Susan was three at the time of the marriage. Richard had separated shortly after his daughter was born. He took alternate four day weekends so that he could participate in the raising of his daughter. Custody arrangements changed with the stepdaughter's development. Throughout those changes Richard maintained close ties to his daughter. A son was born to Mary and Richard a year and a half after the marriage. Richard's ex- wife remarried and then had a son. Mary had not been married before and did not have any of her own children. After the marriage Mary continued to work part-time at home.

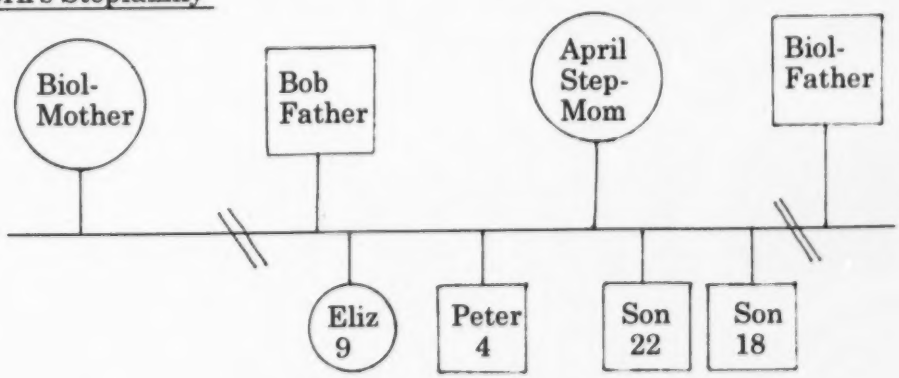
Mary describes herself as being "very fond of children" and later in the interview is able to state that she "loves her stepdaughter a lot." Mary

describes her behavior as "trying to walk a fine line between everybody" so that "the relationships within and between the families will work out." She perceives herself as being the one who can "step back" and be a "bit more objective."

Mary believes that she and Richard have "similar values" such as "the children's right to have a lot to say" within the stepfamily. At the same time she is aware that "she is softer than Richard" regarding certain issues. Mary believes that they both tend to "analyze things to death." She describes Richard "as her best friend." They share equal "veto power" in the stepfamily. Through statements such as, "Dad and I will talk this over, Dad's and my role, Richard and I will discuss it," it is apparent that Mary and Richard parent as a team.

After 13 years of marriage to Richard, their stepdaughter came to live with them. This occurred a year and a half prior to the interviews. With that change in residence came a change in the interactional patterns within the stepfamily. For example, Mary stated that she wanted to be a "primary-player." Towards that end Mary describes "confronting" or "dealing directly with the stepdaughter" around discipline. Mary believes that this caused her stepdaughter "to respect her more."

April's Stepfamily



* See Appendix A for symbol comprehension.

April appears to be a cheerful high-energy individual who is a professional woman with a full-time career in administration in a large organization. April has been married before and has two sons. She divorced her first husband and raised her sons basically alone. At the time she met Bob, her present husband, her boys were university age. April met Bob at church and "consciously chose to get to know him." April and Bob dated for two years and presently have been married for six.

Bob is a professional man in one of the helping fields. He and his ex-wife have joint custody of their two children. When April met the children their ages were Elizabeth 9, and Peter 4. The children stay in each home 3 1/2 days and then move to the other home for 3 1/2 days. Thus the children move twice a week. April found this custody arrangement "difficult."

April describes herself as "being quite proactive." This attitude is mirrored in April's tenacious fight for boundaries. "Fighting for my boundaries has been hard but I've learned to be very strong." In relationship to her stepchildren, April describes herself as the "neutral" person who is "strong and capable." She sees herself as the "emotionally stable one" in the children's lives, someone who can help them "deal with their own feelings." April believes that her stepchildren "know that she loves them" and that she will "be special to these kids regardless of what Mom and Dad do."

Chapter IV

Results of the Study: Four Stages

Stage I: The Beginning

Dad's World Before Stepmom
- Dad's personality
- Custody arrangements
- Relationship between Dad and his children

Stepmoms World
- Stepmom's personality
- Positive attitude and strong involvement
- Motivation
- Activities with stepdaughter
- Stepdaughter's initial reaction to stepmom

Father's Reaction to the Stepmom's Involvement with His Daughter

Stepmom's Perception of the Biological Mother's Reaction to Stepmom's Involvement with Her Daughter

Stepmom's Reaction to the Presence of the Biological Mother in the Early Stages of the Stepfamily Life

Stepmom's Role in the Divorce Story

General Overview of the Early Relationships in the Three Stepfamilies
- Mary's stepfamily
- Laurel's stepfamily
- April's stepfamily

Mary's Reflections on her Fears and Needs as a New Stepmom

Chapter IV

Results of the Study

Chapter IV consists of the presentation of the data. It has been divided into four stages. These stages represent time frames in the evolution of both a stepfamily and the relationship development between stepmother and stepdaughter. However it is the latter that is the focus of this thesis. The time frames were not arbitrary but rather evolved from the data.

Within each time frame or stage are the factors that the stepmothers saw as being most relevant to them at that point. From the stepmother's perspective some of these factors created an issue or issues that needed to be resolved. The stepmother would then request a change in the interactions within the stepfamily or the structure thereof. This created a critical point in the life of the stepfamily. If resolution was incomplete or unsatisfactory from the stepmother's perspective the issue(s) were replayed within the dynamics of the stepfamily until some change occurred. That change varied from complete resolution to the withdrawal of the request for change, by the stepmother. One way or the other, it was only after change occurred that movement into another stage was possible.

The issues and themes presented in all the stages were related to the development of the role of the stepmother in relationship to both the stepfamily and the stepchildren and for the purpose of this research, the stepdaughter. The data in this chapter follows the development of the relationship between stepmother and stepdaughter from their first meetings to their present relationship.

However, before the data analysis can be presented, two critical points that influence the presentation of the data need to be brought to the reader's attention. The first concern is a question - why is the father's world central

to a study whose major question is the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter? The answer lies within the participants and is reflected in the data. The stepmothers want to join, to belong, to become a member of the father's world. It is this desire on the part of the stepmom to belong to an already established unit that gives the father's world its pivotal position in the study.

The second point is the process by which a relationship develops between a stepmom and stepdaughter. It appears from the data that the relationship between a stepmom and stepdaughter is negotiated by the stepmom first through the father and then in differing degrees through the biological mother. This steprelationship is not allowed to develop independently. Different levels of intimacy within the steprelationship call for new negotiations among the "parents." Due to these two factors the data below at first may appear to lack focus. I believe this is a function of the complexity of the process. However with continued analysis, clarity surrounding the factors that contribute to a mutually satisfactory relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter does occur.

One final organizational factor needs to be presented. In the following chapters, the stepmothers will be addressed as stepmoms. This change is due to Marjory's observations that for her "there'll always be the connotation in terms of stepmother, of the wicked old stepmother." Marjory deals with this negativity by using the diminutive of the word. "It is stepmom, the stepmom softens it." Respecting Marjory's perspective, I too will use the diminutive, stepmom throughout chapter four.

With this information in mind the data analysis is presented below.

Stage I: The Beginning

In the very early stages of the formation of a stepfamily there are two very distinct components. The first is the father's world, his personality, his

relationship and involvement with his children, and the custody arrangements between himself and his ex-wife regarding those children. The second component is the future stepmom, her personality and her early motivation for involvement with a man whose world has as one of its primary ingredients either a child or children. It is the coming together of those two distinct worlds that is the starting point of a stepfamily and this thesis.

Dad's World Before Stepmom

According to the data collected from the stepmoms there were three major components at the beginning of the relationship that either enhanced or impeded their integration into the Dad's family unit. They were, his personality, the custody arrangements, and the Dad's relationship and involvement with his children. Each is presented below.

Dad's personality. The dad's personality is an essential component in the stepmom's stories. Whether the dad is aggressive, compliant or somewhere in-between, his actions and reactions to the divorce, custody arrangements, child-care, discipline, to any number of issues or situations, becomes the foundation of his family unit. His personality has created much of the structure of the situation and his personality will determine to a large degree the type and degree of change that might occur within the unit. Certainly for all three stepmothers the dad's personality and how it manifested itself in different situations was a significant contributor to the type and degree of relationship that developed between the stepdaughter and stepmom in the early stages of the stepfamily evolution. Of the three stepmoms, Laurel and April spoke about the personalities of their partner, while Mary did not. It is interesting to note that the stepmoms that discussed their partner's personalities were also the stepmoms who had the most difficulty in establishing themselves in the stepfamily.

Laurel states:

As I say he's very strong, very sure of himself and there were times where my ways were different and the feedback I got was that I was dead wrong and I was unhealthy with it and I just knew that just wasn't it. Without my training I might not have been able to stay in the relationship because sometimes it was so painful the line of B.S. I got from him about me. I got very inappropriate feedback sometimes from him. Tom's a very strong guy. I mean he is hard to cross. I mean if you're not going to agree with him it's very difficult to do. You have to really be a strong cookie yourself to argue with this man ...

April describes Bob's personality in this manner:

he believes in loving people and you know. He's a really good person, he's really good hearted" ... if he didn't agree with me he wouldn't say so, you see. He didn't stand-up to me either, this is his personality.

Custody arrangements. In all three stepfamilies the Dads displayed a desire to be involved in their children's lives. This involvement was evident, right at the beginning of the divorce, by the type of custody arrangements negotiated during the divorce procedures. While all three Dads ended up with different custody arrangements, the high degree of involvement was never a question.

Laurel states "He has the kids (Alex, age 11, Ann, age 8, Chris age 5) with him, primary residence, and they go to their mom's every other weekend and one night a week."

Mary describes Richard's custody arrangements thus:

No, at that time [approx 1975] joint custody wasn't sort of being done. It was an arrangement that Richard and his former wife had. Basically during the weekdays Susan [my stepdaughter] was primarily with her mom. On alternate weekends for four days she was here and Richard

took time off work and looked after her. Once school started, Susan spent the week plus one weekend with her mom and stepfather; and then alternate weekends here, plus holiday time.

It is interesting to note that Mary's husband set this arrangement up before Mary was on the scene and when his daughter was a tiny infant. Here was a man who was willing to take on the responsibility of parenting an infant, certainly an unusual perspective for the mid-70's.

April talks about Bob's custody arrangements:

He is co-parenting and still is 50% with the ex-wife and 50% with us--these kids [Elizabeth, age 9, and Peter, age 4] moved back and forth every Wednesday and every Sunday. Between the Dad and the ex-wife they decided the kids needed three days with each parent to be really even."

Relationship between Dad and his children. All three dads wanted their children to be physically a part of their day-to-day lives as indicated by the custody arrangements. However two of the fathers, Richard and Tom, were more comfortable being emotionally involved with their children as parents than the third.

Laurel describes the relationship between Tom and his children in this manner. "... so they were with him a lot and he's very protective, he's a very nurturing man, he's very involved with his kids ... very, very, very dedicated to being a father, a parent."

Mary perceived Richard's relationship to his daughter as having "... love, the relationship that he had with Susan was very evident, was very strong."

April perceives Bob's relationship to his children to be one in which "he dotes on their every little need, their every little whim." As a parent April describes Bob as "a wimp when it comes to raising these kids."

April describes Bob as lacking in confidence regarding his parenting ability, "I remember Bob being so impressed that I know how to entertain children because he felt quite at loss for what to do with them" and feeling threatened by the rapid introduction of a stepdad to his children. "He was very threatened with his ex-wife remarrying so quickly and bringing this new man into [the stepchildren's] lives." April perceived these issues as contributing to type of relationship Bob has with his children.

The relationship that exists between the father and child or children at the beginning of his relationship with the future stepmom becomes a significant contributing factor in the ease to which a stepmom is able to develop a relationship with her stepdaughter.

The above data gives the reader a brief snap-shot of the personalities and situations of the fathers and their families. However that is only half of the components that go into a stepfamily; the other half is the stepmom. Who are these women and what motivates them?

Stepmom's World

The stepmoms brought to this budding relationship their own personalities, their attitude towards the stepchildren, their motivations surrounding the stepchildren and the activities they engaged in with the stepchildren. As well as these factors, the stepmoms recalled their impressions of their stepdaughter's initial reaction to having a stepmom.

Stepmom's personality. While the dad's personality is the key ingredient in his family unit, the stepmom's personality is significant in how the dynamics within the stepfamily evolve.

Since the stepmoms were identified and discussed in the Introduction to the Stepmoms in Chapter III, only their major characteristics will be briefly highlighted here. From my perspective, Laurel appears to be an open, direct

assertive individual whose approach to a problem is to meet it head-on. Mary is inclined to reflect, to empathize and then to try to find a course of action that takes into consideration the feelings and needs of all the people involved. April is a high energy individual with a deep sense of compassion and a strong need to nurture. She has developed during her time in this stepfamily a clear concept of individual and stepfamily boundaries. Each of these stepmom's personalities - their way of being in the world contributes an element of consistency as to how issues are handled and from that, how interactional processes develop within the stepfamily.

Positive attitude and strong involvement. While each stepmom's story differs on when they began to interact with their stepchildren in the dating process, they all seem to have a positive attitude towards stepparenting and a desire to be involved with the stepchildren.

Laurel states, "From the start I was quite strongly involved with the kids."

Mary states, "I came into it I look back now feeling very positive about the whole experience as if there were going to be no glitches or no problems or anything."

April states, "That was a fun time and I was just sort of playing with the kids and quite happy and very much interested in getting involved ..."

Motivation. It appears that for all three stepmoms the presence of a child or children was not considered a liability in the relationship. In fact for Laurel and April these children seem to represent the possibility of obtaining something they thought they had lost. At least initially, their motivation for continuing in the relationship had to do in part with fulfilling an old wish or hope.

Laurel comments, "I've never had my own kids so I was kind of interested in really being a part of a family and part of the kids."

April states:

> Now how much of that is my own stuff in that I also didn't have a daughter of my own. I had two sons and had always longed to have a daughter. Ya, it was a big hidden dream. I always thought a mother/daughter relationship would be really special. I had always longed for that.

This does not appear to be the case for Mary. Her motivation for developing a relationship with her stepdaughter is based on a general fondness for children and a specific fondness for her stepdaughter.

Mary states, "I was very fond of Susan and fond of children."

Activities with stepdaughter. This desire for involvement translated into actual activities which the stepmom's saw as mothering behaviors.

Laurel states:

> I helped them with life choices when there were difficulties. I helped them with their homework. I was there a lot in their home and they were there. I'd shop sometimes for them and with them. I'd sew their clothes when they were ripped, talk to them about their pain as the kind of things a mother--any mother does.

Mary states:

> I guess I did the things I would have done if Susan were actually my daughter. We baked together cookies and we did crafts together, we'd go to the zoo together. The three of us would go on picnics together. At that time Susan and I would go shopping and other times out to dinner in restaurants. I sewed a bit at that time so I sewed clothes for her.

April states:

> I actually sewed shorts for them and I would cook what they wanted and liked. And what I did special is I crocheted an afghan for each of

> the kids. ... I would take Elizabeth shopping or practice French braiding her hair. Like a real mother/daughter kind of bond which we really worked on initially and it really felt easy initially.

The data to this point indicates the stepmothers as being supportive, nurturing and free of conflict in their interactions with the stepdaughter. I will make future reference to this behavior as the "good mother." This perspective is supported by Laurel in Chapter IV, Stage II, the section entitled Laurel's Further Attempts at Initiating an Allegiance Shift in Tom.

Stepdaughter's initial reaction to stepmom. All three stepdaughters seemed at first to be content to be the recipient of the nurturing activities of their respective stepmoms. However, for Laurel and Mary's stepdaughters there came a point fairly early in the relationship when they tried to understand and classify their relationship with their stepmoms. For example Mary's stepdaughter, Susan, who lived with her dad and stepmom on alternating four day weekends and who was quite young [approx 4] used make-believe to help her:

> I remember one morning it was, "Let's pretend that you're my Daddy and that my Mommy's my Mommy and I'm your little girl" and Richard said "What about Mary?" There was silence for a while, "She can be the housekeeper" ... A little later on it became, "Well maybe we could all live together in this house." So she was working through so that she could put people where they really were.

Laurel's stepdaughter, Ann, who was approximately 10 and had primary residence with Tom handled a relationship with a stepmom by trying to develop a "term" for it:

> She called me a mother figure long before I realized it. I only had only been going with Tom about a year, so I was quite startled. She said

"You're like a cross between a mommy and an aunt. I should call you an mant or a mont." Then she giggled and we laughed together.

April's stepdaughter, Elizabeth, seems pleased to have April do things and buy things for her:

I love buying stuff for a little girl maybe a little sweat shirt or t-shirt or something. She'd say "Oh, thank-you" and then come and give me a big hug and I just felt so loved you know and so, it felt really mutual.

However at no point does April describe an event that would indicate that her stepdaughter was trying to deal with having a second mother figure in her life.

Data will be presented in subsequent sections that will show that Elizabeth's biological parents will continue to play dominant roles in their daughter's life such that Elizabeth apparently does not need to integrate a stepmom.

Father's Reaction to the Stepmom's Involvement with His Daughter

The budding relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter is influenced by and influences the behaviors of other significant individuals in the stepdaughters life such as her father and the biological mother. Presented below are the father's and biological mother's reactions from the stepmom's perception.

The father's reactions varied. April did not mention Bob's reaction to her nurturing behaviors towards his children. Laurel, on the other hand recalled Tom's willingness to be excluded from an intimate family moment so that she could bond with the stepchildren:

He wanted me to be close to them. I can remember sitting and watching TV and them all cuddled around me and him kind of isolated.

> I felt kind of bad and he did too but he preferred that, to see the kids bond with me, than himself be included at that point.

Mary described Richard's reaction as one in which he pushed Mary and the stepdaughter at each other, because he desperately wanted them to love each other. "In that he wanted so desperately for Susan and I to love one another that perhaps he sometimes tried to rush things a little bit with us. That he almost pushed us at one another."

Mary expanded on Richard's reaction to her involvement with his daughter by describing his willingness to share his daughter, "the one thing that always amazed me was his willingness to share in terms of (his daughter) and in terms of doing things" and to trust Mary absolutely in her interactions with Susan:

> ... But he's always been absolutely fantastic. Like there was never any sense, not even the tiniest bit that he didn't trust me totally, in terms of physically or psychologically doing any harm to her whatsoever ....

The seeds to an honest relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter are mentioned here by Mary . They are found in the father's absolute trust in Mary as a safe person for his daughter to interact with and his willingness to share his daughter. As we continue it will become apparent to the reader that it is these ingredients plus others that the stepmoms are trying to negotiate from the fathers, and to a much lesser degree the biological mothers.

<u>Stepmom's Perception of the Biological Mother's Reaction to Stepmom's Involvement with her Daughter</u>

In the early stages of the formation of the stepfamily the stepmothers had minimal if any contact with the biological mothers. Their information regarding the effect they might be having on the biological mother is all

surmised from the reactions that came back to them through the children. For example, while Laurel has no idea of how her presence might have affected the biological mother, Mary can recall an incident that occurred in the early years of her relationship with her stepdaughter. Mary perceived this incident as one of the biological mother's first attempts to work through the fact that another woman was involved in a significant manner in her daughter's life.

Mary stated:

> When Susan was small I painted my toenails bright red and I enjoy doing that. She was fascinated by this as a little kid, as little girls often are with nail polish and what not. So I painted her toenails a pale pink one weekend when she was here. We were doing things together, and I thought this won't be on her fingernails so it won't show if her mom doesn't approve. But there was a great upset in the other household that I would do this, and I was never to do this again. I perceived a great overreaction to what was happening until I stepped back and thought that all the other things that had been happening had not had a physical concrete expression of this other woman doing things with my daughter. This was the first time in a way that there has been anything concrete that has come back from the weekends. This is happening and the reaction, I think that the biological mother was beginning to work through the fact that I was on the scene. Although intellectually she obviously knew it, she hadn't started to really work through.

April described a similar situation regarding the biological mother's reaction to April clothes shopping with Elizabeth. "That created trouble with the ex-wife, she was hurt about that. That should be a mother's role.

Why was April doing that?" [There was] "great pain over that and so I cooled that a little bit. Then, so that was clothes shopping."

This information was relayed to April at least in part through the stepdaughter, "'No, Mom doesn't want you to buy school clothes for the fall this year. You did it last year, but she's going to do it from now on O.K.'? So mother set down rules."

Within the reactions described above by the stepmoms, a first glimpse appears of another stepfamily interaction; that is the attempt by the biological mother to influence or control her child while in the stepmom or father's custody.

One might speculate that in both Mary and April's case the biological mother felt that her role as mother was being threatened by the activities between stepmom and stepdaughter. Perhaps out of their fear of losing their daughters both biological mothers tried to dictate what activities the stepmoms could or could not do with the stepdaughters. In April's case the biological mother succeeded; in Mary's case the biological mother failed. It is interesting to note that where the fathers support of stepmom was minimal as in April's case, the biological mother was able to control the activities between stepmom and stepdaughter. However, where the father's support of the stepmom was high as in Mary's case, the biological mother's attempt at control was unsuccessful.

The biological mother's reaction to the involvement of a stepmom with her daughter can vary from one of no perceived response, to "a few power plays," to a setting down of rules around what activities are appropriate for a stepmom even when the stepdaughter is within the physical confines of Dad's stepfamily. Custody arrangements and fathers support of stepmom seem to be factors that influence how the reaction by the biological mother will affect the new stepfamily.

Stepmom's Reaction to the Presence of the Biological Mother in the Early Stages of the Stepfamily Life

Each of the stepmoms had their own unique reaction to the presence of the biological mother which seems to be a function of their personality, their training, their circumstances or the degree of involvement of the biological mother.

Mary had two very distinct reactions to the biological mother's presence. One seems to be based on empathy for the biological mother:

> Ya I think again I've tried on many occasions to put myself in the place of the biological mother. That must be very difficult to share the bringing up of your child with another woman because there is obviously a very very strong relationship between mom and daughter. It's very much there and I've always tried to walk a fine, fine, line of not trying to supplant in Susan's mind or in her mom's mind that I was trying to be her mom.

The other seems to be based on the amount of influence the biological mother had through the stepdaughter, on the functioning of the stepfamily.

Mary said:

> Early on I really resented the fact that this biological mom had so much power in terms of making decisions about what our family could and couldn't do, and when we could do them and when we couldn't.

Because of Laurel's extensive training in family dynamics and the fact that the biological mother was the non-custodial parent, her perspective is different. She perceives that the continued involvement of the biological mother in the children's lives is an asset to her as a stepmom. Laurel believes that their mom's interest prevents the children from having to deal with feelings of abandonment or split loyalties:

> But I think I really strongly believe that their Mom being in the picture was an asset for me rather than a liability and still is. I think their loyalties were not split because mom was still there. I really think that if she weren't in the picture there'd be...so say she had abandoned them and they felt rejected. I think they'd work that out on me, testing me.

As noted above in April's case the biological mother did not want the stepmom performing activities that she perceived as within her realm as "mother." As indicated April lowered her level of involvement with her stepdaughter, which caused April to experience a sense of loss. Researcher "... that sounds like that feels like a loss for you." April "It does, it does, ya it really does. I really wanted to be involved in their lives. ... and to be heard and to be regarded as my opinion counts and be valued and it does hurt."

April's rationale for withdrawing from her desired level of involvement with her stepdaughter is explained thus:

> I mostly obeyed them [biological mother's rules] so that Elizabeth wouldn't feel [in a] double bind caught [in] that "Oh, I shouldn't be getting my hair cut with April because Mom wants to do this." Ya, she was already trapped between Mom and Dad ... terribly and so I thought Well she doesn't need me in there pulling at her either and she let me know (about) those pulls.

Stepmom's Role in the Divorce Story

While all three stepmoms met their potential partners after the separation, two of them subsequently acquired a role around his divorce. Again there is an interesting parallel between the length of time and involvement in the "divorce story" and the ease with which the stepfamily life evolves. For example both Laurel and April speak of supporting the

stepchildren through the biological parents' divorce. However for Laurel this occurred only at the beginning of life in a stepfamily:

> I was as neutral as anybody in her life to listen to what it was like for her to be in this situation. How she felt when her Dad put her Mom down. Some of the problems you know between her mom and her stepdad and what they did sometimes ... it felt safe to do that with me because I wouldn't take anybody's side. I made it safe for her to talk about it and gave her some guidelines and tried to help her speak up.

April, who had the most difficulty in developing stepfamily relationships, speaks of supporting the children on this issue in the early days of stepfamily life:

> So anyway, the stepson, Peter, wouldn't go this one evening and he's sitting in the livingroom, and I said "So you have a headache, huh?", "Ya" and I said "Well do you get a headache when you hear Mom and Dad fight?," because they'd been fighting on the phone, they yell at each other a lot. He said "No, that has nothing to do with it," and I said "No, well that's good because you know it just isn't your problem that Mom and Dad fight dear. They fought before you were born and they're going to fight when you're long gone and married and have kids of your own. It just isn't your problem." ... he cheered right up. That's been my role in the family, the same with Elizabeth.

And, seven years later, she is still supporting them in much the same manner:

> They're sort of using me as the neutral person I've become I think in this family, about "Well, Mom says Dad will never get around ... he was trying to do this for 25 years and he'll never get to that. What do you think about that,?" So I have the opportunity to say. "Well Mom and

Dad had those disagreements long before you were born and they're still continuing. This does not relate to you, this is their stuff."

While Laurel and April struggled with this issue, Mary does not mention the need to support the stepdaughter through a "divorce story" at any time. Perhaps for Mary's stepfamily the divorce was basically resolved before the arrival of a stepmom.

General Overview of the Early Relationships in the Three Stepfamilies

For approximately one to two years the general task of the stepfamily was the development of relationships between members. These relationships are briefly highlighted here. Since the supportive data for these summaries has generally already been presented in either the Introduction to the Stepmoms or in Chapter IV, Stage I, it will not be reiterated.

Mary's stepfamily. At this point in time, Mary's stepfamily is presented as one in which Mary is trusted and encouraged by Richard to interact with Susan in a loving and nurturing manner in all areas of development except discipline. The biological mother although apparently mildly resentful of Mary's activities with her daughter does not interfere with the budding relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter. Susan through make-believe tries to reconcile the divorce and the appearance of a "second mother."

Laurel's stepfamily. In the early stages of Laurel's stepfamily we have Laurel nurturing her stepchildren with certain reservations on the part of the father. From Laurel's perspective Tom is very protective and over involved with his children. It is equally apparent that Laurel is a strong individual ("I take something on, head on") with clear ideas on healthy family functioning due to her training in a helping profession. The potential

for conflict around personalities, different parenting techniques ("My ways were different") and the expression of negative emotions seems highly probable.

April's stepfamily. In April's early stepfamily dynamics, we see April trying to develop a relationship with Elizabeth. From April's perspective, her nurturing activities with the stepdaughter went unnoticed by Bob and opposed by the biological mother. The apparent consequences of these factors is a lag in the development of a parent/child bond between the stepdaughter and the stepmom.

Generally, all three stepmoms continued to function during this time from the "good-mother" perspective. The avoidance of negative emotions causes the stepfamily to operate at a certain level. It is only when the potential for conflict is introduced through the stepmoms' request for change in either some aspect of the stepdaughters behavior or the stepfamily structure that this status quo is disturbed and the next stage in the development of a stepfamily is initiated.

Mary's Reflections on her Fears and Needs as a New Stepmom

In reflecting on the early stages of the relationship between herself, Richard, and Susan, Mary was able to identify her major fears and needs, and the course of action she followed. These reflections were placed here at the end of stage one because of their general significance to the early development of the stepmom/stepdaughter relationship.

Mary states:

> ... when you've come into a relationship where there is obviously a very strong relationship between the child and the father is that maybe there is a fear. Maybe that is a concern, "Hey is this going to work" or maybe he'll choose to keep the relationship with the child versus the relationship with the new wife.

In relationship to that fear Mary wanted to be reassured. Below Mary clearly identified what she needed to feel reassured.

Mary states:

> I was the new person coming into that relationship and I needed to feel assured that I had that love and loyalty as well. Not that I was competing for the loyalty that he showed towards Susan but that I had an equal but different love and loyalty."

Mary then goes on and imagines how it must be for the father, trying to balance these two relationships.

Mary states:

> ... the parent, the father is having to deal with he doesn't want to lose the daughter. He wants to keep the new relationship as well and so he's walking a fine line as well in terms of things because he doesn't want to lose either one.

Finally Mary identified in these early interactions an area of possible conflict between the three of them--disciplining the stepdaughter. "We talked about [the] control and discipline thing. I think Richard had to work at that at times. His willingness to share--except for this issue of disciplining."

Mary having spotted what she perceives as a possible stumbling block to the stepfamily, consciously chooses to become a "consultant" to the father around discipline. This will be discussed more thoroughly as it becomes critical to the process.

In Mary's reflection we see another key ingredient in relationship development in a step-family. Mary clearly states that to alleviate her fear of losing to the established father/daughter relationship she needed to receive from the father "equal but different love and loyalty." This, one might presume would then put the stepmom on an equal footing with his

child or children in the eyes of all the stepfamily members. From that position plus her status as a loving adult and the support and trust of the father, the stepmom has the potential to move to a full-parent in the developing stepfamily. However there are, as the data will reveal, a number of other components that also must be resolved before that can occur.

Chapter IV

The Results of the Study: Four Stages

Stage II: The Hidden Critical Point

A Request for Change
- Mary's request
- Laurel's request
- April's request

Fathers' Responses to Stepmoms' Requests
- Richard's response
- Tom's response
- Bob's response

Outcome of Fathers' Responses to Requests for Change

Stepdaughters' Reactions to Requests for Change

Laurel's Further Attempts at Initiating an Allegiance Shift in Tom

April's Further Attempts at Initiating an Allegiance Shift in Bob

Stage II The Hidden Critical Point

A Request For Change

After one to two years of these nurturing activities the stepmoms asked for a change in the father/daughter relationship or the structure of the stepfamily. The importance of this request is hinted at only by Mary. "I didn't put it forward at the time as a test of Richard, but I don't know what, I think I would have felt very badly if he had not sided with me in that incident." Mary realized after the fact that the request was possibly a test of the bond between herself and Richard.

Below are the first requests for change made by each stepmom.

Mary's request.

> Susan was used to, when she woke up in the morning coming into bed. This could vary from 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. to 5:00 in the morning and I wasn't comfortable with that. I really am not comfortable with this. I've no problems with coming and jumping into bed with us in the morning as little kids do and talking but I really would like it to be 7:00 unless there is a nightmare, or she's sick. That was the first time I asked for a change in terms of a pattern, ...it took some working through.

Laurel's request.

> It just got [to be] a pattern and the youngest one you know sleeping with dad was a really good thing, and he wanted it too, so they alternated. So every night there was a kid in bed with him ... when I came over and if we slept together he'd pick the kids up and carry them to their own bed, and they'd wake up in their own bed, sometimes they'd wake up while he was doing it. Well when I wasn't there they slept the night. So I said "Look it, this means this is a treat to them and they're

not getting it any more because I'm here. So it looks like I'm the problem for them and screw that, you just take care of it. I don't think they should be sleeping with you anyway. I don't think it's good for them . . . it's like I'm depriving them of something. Just, so I asked him first, told him, told him first 'I want you to do this' explained to him why."

April's request.

Ya and I fought long and hard. We had family conferences with the ex-wife, and Bob and me and her husband at the time she also got married. To sit down the four of us I said "Let's make it every Sunday we move, let's just make one week at a time" and there was no way, the ex-wife wouldn't hear of it . . . she knew that the children needed their mother every week this could not be and I said "Well even if they could come for dinner on Wednesday night or could we just you know."

Fathers' Responses to Stepmoms' Requests

The father's response to these requests for change was critical to the future dynamics within the stepfamily. For their own unique reasons each of the fathers found these requests difficult.

Richard's response. Through this request for change Mary perceived Richard as struggling with two issues; the need to share the raising of his daughter with another person and balancing his loyalty between his daughter and new wife:

We talked about it. I think there was a variety of things. One was that he was used to being the sole person in terms of making decisions about Susan. It meant an adjustment and realization for him too that he was again to share in terms of decisions about his daughter. He was already sharing a lot of things with the biological mom but now there was

another person who was going to share that with. I think and again this is my perception I can't remember now totally in terms of the feelings but [to] some extent that sort of the loyalty. Him being true to Susan as well as to Mary.

Tom's response. Laurel's husband Tom also had great difficulty with her request for change.

Laurel states:

But the thing about the kids sleeping with him was a struggle. [The change in behavior] didn't happen, it didn't happen and then I said OK you've got a choice here. I'm quite clear that I'm not putting up with this. You take care of it.

Laurel perceived Tom's difficulty around this request to be not only in the change itself but also that she had given him an ultimatum:

The only time I've given the man an ultimatum was over that. I said "You take care of this or I'm gone" ... the ultimatum pissed him off for years; that I had the gall to give him an ultimatum.

Tom finally agreed to Laurel's request. "So he did but boy he didn't like that."

Bob's response. Bob's response to April's request for change in the custody arrangements is in some sense obscured by the fact that the request involved both families. However, we do know that the custody arrangements were not changed.

April states:

But it [the custody arrangements] was kept that way ... there was no movement because it fit their work schedule. It fit their need to have equal power over the children. It fit their need to be [have] equal parenting. They were very worried that staying too long with one parent would you know, take away from the other parent.

Mary and Laurel ask for a change in a behavior that was totally within the realm of the new stepfamily. They asked for that change from the father and not directly of the stepdaughter. The responsibility of meeting or not meeting their request was therefore solely the father's. April, on the other hand, asked for a change in custody arrangements, which of necessity involved the ex-wife and her new husband. It then becomes unclear if Bob would have met April's request for change if he could have.

Outcome of Fathers' Responses to Requests for Change

Laurel, while achieving the change she requested did not indicate how, if any, that change in behavior affected her or her stepfamily. However, for Mary and April there were distinct outcomes from the father's response to the request for change, that affected the stepmoms as individuals and the dynamics within the stepfamily.

For Mary the positive resolution of sharing the raising of the stepdaughter and balancing the loyalty issues between stepmom and stepdaughter, by the father had two main effects.

First, Mary perceived this event as establishing her as a stepmom. "It's interesting I think I came in feeling like her stepmom but I guess it took probably the first confrontation that I had with Richard where I asked him to change a behavior" to validate that perspective.

Secondly Mary believed that this one incident was sufficient to resolve these two issues in her stepfamily, so that the stepfamily could proceed:

> I'm trying to go back now in terms of Richard and I, in terms of the sharing thing. I don't think we after that initial one I don't think nothing stands out in my mind specifically in terms of examples that involved Susan. Somehow once we resolved that we went from there and I can't think of any other.

April perceived her inability to achieve change around the custody arrangements as impacting negatively on her:

> but I could tell you it was really hard on me. It felt like they never settled. I didn't feel settled and they didn't feel settled but I had no power to change that. It's very very difficult for me and I bet you it's harder for me than anybody.

The custody arrangements which had the stepchildren moving from house to house twice a week, also negatively impacted the interactions within the stepfamily. This impact was most noticeable in the interactions in the first 24 hours after a move. These interactions became so predictable that April named them "transition fever."

April states:

> Ya, dragging them back and forth and that we call it now transition fever. I labelled it and it was me that picked it up because all of us go through it, the moving back and forth all the time. Bob goes "ZZZZZ" Peter acts out ZZZZ, throwing things, hitting, jumping, Elizabeth withdraws to her room and gets on the phone closes the door and don't bother me. I think we sort of let it happen. Peter might go and watch TV. If it's really bad Peter will get a headache or a stomach, or a cold. He has the physical symptoms, Elizabeth would withdraw, I would withdraw a little bit.

The outcomes for Mary and April as individuals and for their stepfamilies are dramatically opposite. For Mary, Richard's response solidified her role as a stepmom and created an impetus for growth. For April, Bob's response exasperates her emotional state and the interactions within the stepfamily. April perceived her stepfamily as being in a state of "transition fever" where disassociation and confusion prevail.

Stepdaughters' Reactions to Requests for Change

Laurel and April did not comment on how their stepdaughters reacted to the request for change. However, Mary recalls her stepdaughter accepting the change with ease. "It was fascinating because as far as Susan was concerned there was no problem 'Oh, O.K., 7:00, I won't come in until 7:00,' for her there was no adjustment."

In summary, all three stepmoms asked for a change in behavior in the relationship to the stepchildren or the stepfamily structure. Underneath this request seems to be the need to ascertain whether or not the fathers had developed an allegiance to the stepmoms to balance that which existed between father and daughter. At this point in time, in the three stepfamilies above only Richard through his response to the request for change was able to provide Mary with the reassurance that a shift in allegiances had occurred.

Bob and Tom were unable to do this. However, both stepmoms try again.

Laurel's Further Attempts at Initiating an Allegiance Shift in Tom

Laurel recalled a number of early incidents that addressed the unresolved issue of Dad's support and trust of the stepmom in her interactions with his children. The one below was selected because it involved the stepdaughter and because it illustrates clearly the struggle of those early interactions.

Laurel recalls:

> Ann was making a lot of put downs of me to her friends and I wanted to speak to her about it because it wasn't feeling good to me it was disrespectful and painful rather than funny. I didn't like it. So I spoke to her about it.

Tom reacted to that incident by defending his daughter, "He told me to cut it out and I was being whatever, right in front of her."

Stepmom felt that:

> that was wrong ... he just should of stayed out of it. I think he undermined me right in front of her and spoke to me and said I was speaking to harshly and I was, oh and I said that to him. Look it, that's my relationship with her, I agree with you that I was out of line or I was speaking too harshly and that needed correction but I know that and I can correct that.

Laurel perceived Tom's reaction as being "unhelpful to Ann and my relationship and VERY unhelpful to his and mine."

Laurel perceived Tom's overprotective behaviors and attitudes regarding his children as a deterrent to her being able to be her authentic self. She felt she was only allowed to be the "good- mother."

Laurel states:

> Tom didn't make it safe in the beginning for me to be really real with the kids when we first, at least a year, if not a couple of years. If I was upset with them, if there was something that was bothering me, I really wanted to be healthy and straight he made that very difficult. He was so overprotective of them. He was really hard on me, I think you know protective pappa bear. So I was to love them and be able to stay nice to them and when I was angry or upset he had a lot of difficulty with that.

Laurel saw this incident as a "turning point" in how she chose to interaction with her stepchildren. She no longer wanted Tom's "pappa bear behaviors" to determine how she interacted with them. Laurel felt that Tom would have to adjust to her being authentic with the stepchildren.

Laurel states:

I had to be straight with this kid, all of the kids, because I wasn't going to go through that again where I'd built up too much. That for me I felt so much more solid with them after that.

And I guess there's a part "well to hell with Tom if he can't handle it, then. We've got to get out of this." It was like that healthy turning point like I've been tiptoeing around or he didn't handle this well and by God he's going to have to that kind of determination that I wasn't just going to shrivel up because he hurt me.

Thus over time and through a number of "painful interactions" such as the one above Laurel was able to clearly formulate what she needed from Tom to allow her to continue in her relationship with them all. Laurel asked Tom for his support and trust in her in relationships to his children EVEN when she was making mistakes.

Laurel states:

I was quite clear with him about that - I will not marry Tom, this is my condition of marriage support me, including making mistakes with the kids. You have to trust me. You've got to decide. Are your ready to do that? If you're not ready to trust me don't marry me. Look it, not only do you have to trust me with your children you have to stand back while I make mistakes with them. Like in the thing with Ann. I don't think I'm making mistakes but if I had you've got to support me anyway. Me, not her even if I'm hurting her. You've got to support me, you've got to chose that are you ready to chose that? That was hard for him but he agreed.

Tom was able to agree to Laurel's request. "Just the acknowledgment that a natural biological parent isn't perfect makes mistakes and things go on and work out helped him to go 'Ya, they can handle a stepparent too.'"

The development of trust has a recursive pattern to it. As Tom came to acknowledge that his children would survive in relationship to Laurel, Laurel also came to realize how "hard [it's been] for Tom to trust me" with his children. Laurel described the present level of trust between them regarding the stepchildren in this manner, "For the most part he does now trust me and he has for a long time. I think it's Tom I need to trust more. I guess I do more since the last conversation."

Laurel then went into the marriage with a belief in the developmental ability of the individuals in the system and a belief in the future. "Even at day one of marriage it wasn't exactly where I wanted [it] to be. I had enough faith in Tom and me and the kids that it wouldn't always be the way it was at day one."

In retrospect Laurel was surprised "in terms of how Tom has supported me he's done better than I thought he would. He's made fewer [mistakes] actually than I anticipated and he's moved on."

When compared, Laurel's and Mary's transcripts reflect the common need for Dad's support and trust of the stepmom in her interactions with to his children. As well, both these stepmoms used issues regarding the stepdaughter to negotiate these required elements of trust and support. However, how often that process needed to be activated differed dramatically in the two stepfamilies.

<u>April's Further Attempts at Initiating an Allegiance Shift in Bob</u>

April tried to elicit Bob's support of her in relationship to the stepchildren in a number of areas, one of which was household chores.

April states:

> I remember writing these charts on the fridge. I mean, I did the stars thing you know, buy the star stickers and the whole thing to get us to do

little jobs. And you know and tried to get them to help and be part of the family.

Bob's response to April's request for support around household chores was to either not actively participate, "Bob [was] not being supportive of those [the charts and star stickers] you know, kids checking off when they've done this" or to undermine the stepmom's approach, "so I'd find out later that he didn't follow through on it or that he said 'Oh well then you don't have to do that you know.'"

Bob's lack of support and his undermining of April's parenting approach caused her to realize that "I was the only one doing it and I got tired of it. So I stopped but that was after a couple of years of trying."

It is interesting to note that both Laurel and April comment on how destructive the father's undermining behaviors are to relationships within the stepfamily.

Finally in withdrawing from trying to get the stepchildren to contribute to the household chores April thought "[she] would be loved more and feel closer [to the stepchildren]." However in reality she found that she "carry[s] around a low grade resentment of this big sixteen year old girl ... who's doing nothing to contribute to the home."

Thus to recap this stage, we had three stepmoms who, through a hidden critical incident, tried to establish an allegiance shift on the part of the fathers from the original nuclear family ties, to them. Although the shift was difficult for all the fathers, Richard was able to achieve the necessary degree of shift for his stepfamily in one incident. Laurel's husband, Tom was able over a long period of time and through a number of incidents to finally support and trust Laurel in her interactions with his children. Unfortunately April's husband Bob was unable to shift his allegiance from his children to April and was unable to support April in her interactions with them.

Chapter IV

The Results of the Study: Four Stages

Stage III: Issues in Relationship Development

Decision Making
- Mary's experience of decision making
- April's experience of decision making
- Laurel's experience of decision making

Disciplining
- Mary's experience of discipline
- April's experience of discipline
- Laurel's experience of discipline

Creating a Boundary Around the Stepfamily
- April's experience of boundaries
- Mary's experience of boundaries

Relationships
- General relationships between stepmoms and stepdaughters
- Relationship between Mary and her stepdaughter
- Relationship between Laurel and her stepdaughter
- Relationship between Laurel, her stepdaughter and the biological mother
- Relationship between April and her stepdaughter
- Relationship between April, her stepdaughter and the biological parents

Stage III: Issues in Relationship Development

In the next stage the stepmoms and their respective stepfamilies dealt with three general issues, decision making, disciplining, and relationship building. A fourth issue, boundary creation, will be discussed here because of its critical significance for April's stepfamily. Each stepmom's experiences of these issues was very much a function of the personalities involved, the relationships and the interactional patterns that had already been established in the respective stepfamilies. While these factors were in play in all four issues, they were most obvious in the sensitive area of discipline.

The reader needs to be aware that while these issues will be presented below as separate events in reality they occurred within the dynamics of the stepfamily simultaneously.

Thus how each issue is dealt with by the individuals in the stepfamily impacts not only on the next similar event but also on the other issues presented in this stage. A change in the interactional behaviors on one issue tends to affect all the issues.

Decision Making

Mary's experience of decision making. From Mary's perspective decision-making appears to have two components. They are decisions that affect the stepfamily as a whole, and decisions between the father and stepdaughter. In each of these areas Mary identifies a different role for herself.

In relationship to the stepfamily as a whole Mary describes herself as having decision-making power equal to Richard's:

> The way I conceptualized it in my own mind was that if it had anything to do with -- Richard, Susan, myself and our biological son, the well being of the family as a whole then I was no longer a consultant. Then

> that was very much something that Richard and I dealt with together and that we had equal share in that. The way Richard and I have it sort of set up is that both of us have a say in terms of how things are going. We have veto power that we don't use very often but if something is very strong and very important to us we can use our veto power. Then that means we have to stop and find another route.

In the second area of decision-making Mary acts as a mediator for Susan in relationship to her Dad on issues such as number of evenings out a week and fulfilling responsibilities around the house:

> I am usually softer than her Dad in terms of how much she can go out or what not. So sometimes she will come to me and talk about some of those things so that I can soften things with her dad. Susan has responsibilities around the household and I am perhaps more inclined to help out with those responsibilities whereas her dad thinks that she hasn't got a lot so she should do the ones [she has].

Mary's role in decision making appears to be determined by the situation.

An interesting element mentioned by Mary around decision-making was that she and Richard shared similar values regarding the rights and responsibilities inherent in the freedom of choice. They believed in "giving the kids a lot of say on things and choices where we feel that they have the right, not only the right but the responsibility."

It appears that this shared attitude facilitated decision-making in the stepfamily:

> Here's your clothing allowance for the month--we will help out with the financial aspect if you run into trouble but basically you choose your clothes. We will only step in if it's highly inappropriate and we will let you know if it's highly inappropriate and then you have to judge.

While Mary and Richard handled decision making from the above perspective, April had a different experience.

April's experience of decision making. April found that she was "left out of the parenting." The sense of being left out seems to originate in not being allowed to help with decision-making:

> When I'd have my fights with Bob, and we still have them, I would say "Somehow it's not you that there's something wrong with it's the whole mess. It's the ex-wife, it's the kids, it's the coming, it's the going, the lack of being included in decision making. You go and just do this and I wasn't included."

April talked about being excluded from making decisions in several areas of the stepchildren's lives. She gives examples of that exclusion on the following issues:

1) Determining allowances: "Between the ex-wife and Bob they had just decided that Peter should get eighty dollars a month allowance and he's eleven years old. I was not included in the discussion. Peter told me about it."

2) Stepchildren's activities: "I don't drive those kids to skiing or choir I just say 'Leave me out of it. I wasn't part of the decision making I'm not doing it.' You guys made the decision you live with it."

3) Health and dental care: Researcher: "Did you ever do things like take her to the dentist?" April: "No, it was always done by one of the primary parents."

4) Clothes expenditures:

> It's nothing for her to go out and her mother still does these kinds of tricks; which is they split the cost 50-50 on children's clothes. So she'll buy Elizabeth a $500 coat, I'm just making up a number but an expensive coat. Then come and say "Bob you pay me half for that" and I

said "Bob excuse me did you agree to this ahead of time? Can she just go and spend any kind of money and come back and tell you fifty percent is yours?" "Oh, well you know I don't want to be hard on the kids."

5) Recreational expenditures:

Then it would be things like I came home from work one day and Bob had bought a $1,200 trampoline for the backyard for the kids. I thought "Bob excuse me, but did you just spend $1,200 and didn't even talk about it with me?" "Oh ya the kids need this."

The biological parents continued to make decisions regarding the stepchildren in many areas of their lives. At no point was April included in these decisions. Based on our knowledge of how much April wanted to belong to this unit, this exclusion from decision-making must have been very painful. April alludes to this pain when she states "So it's just been really really hard. So I've given up a lot and it's been [for] my own self care as part of it."

Laurel's experience of decision making. From the section Activities with Stepdaughter in Stage I it was apparent that Laurel was involved with her stepchildren in a "parent-like" role. She helped them with their homework, shopped with them, for them and listened to them. However, throughout Laurel's transcripts decision making regarding allowances, activities, clothing decisions and recreational expenditures were not mentioned. The emphasis for Laurel was gaining the father's trust and support in her disciplining of his children. It appears that decision making was not an area of struggle for this stepfamily.

Disciplining

Discipline was contentious for all three stepmoms.

Mary's experience of disciplining. In Stage I Mary stated that sharing the discipline of the stepdaughter was difficult for Richard. In her second interview Mary was able to clarify that difficulty:

> Because in the early stages he, I'll use the word 'control' but not, I don't mean in a negative way but Richard had very little control in terms of Susan's upbringing. Because most of that was done by the biological mom. So he had lost a lot of control or say over things that were happening and I didn't want to detract any more from what control what say he had in terms of bringing up Susan.

The results of Mary's understanding was that she "consciously [chose to be] sort of a consultant around discipline." From the consultant's position Mary:

> ...told Richard what I thought and what I sort of felt would be best in terms of dealing with some of the things that come up in terms of Susan's behavior. But it was Richard generally that dealt face to face in terms of Susan.

The consultant position functioned for Mary as a "specific thing, in terms of Susan then Richard would deal with it, but if it had ramifications in terms of the family then both of us would deal with it."

However, Mary did not always act as a consultant. She recalled an earlier incident when:

> Susan and Richard had been doing some stuff downstairs and I hadn't been aware of what was going on. Susan came upstairs and she spit, and said something. Spitting to me is sort of one of the absolute "No, no's" in the world. I let her know immediately in terms of that was unacceptable behavior. So I did intervene in terms of discipline when it was directly directed at me or something like that. That was when she was quite young and she immediately burst out "I want to go home to

> my mommy." It just blows my mind because I didn't know how to deal with that at that point. So I went and talked to Richard. What do we do, sort of thing? "Oh" he said "No problem" he said "O.K., Susan pack your bags come on we'll take you home if that's what you want to do we'll go" which of course was exactly the right thing to do....

Mary perceived Richard's willingness to deal with the disciplining as a means of protecting Mary "from being sort of the wicked stepmother" and "from any conflict with Susan or to protect me and [the stepdaughter] from conflict."

Based on Mary's and Richard's behaviors disciplining the stepdaughter was perceived by both of them to be a possible area of conflict which might negatively affect the relationship within the stepfamily. Therefore they chose to handle the situation by basically having Richard as the main disciplinarian with Mary as a consultant.

April's experience of disciplining. As shown earlier, April was discouraged from being a nurturing parent (Stage I) and excluded from decision making around the children. In stark contrast, however, April was "invited by Bob" to act as the disciplinarian in the stepfamily.

As the active disciplinarian, April expended a lot of energy in trying to elicit Bob's support:

> It was complex in that I'd have to talk Bob around to it and it took more energy. It was more, "Now Bob I want you to know that this is what I've decided and I need your support on this" and "Oh I'm going to do this and I need your support on that." So there was a lot of negotiation and talking and here's my rationale.

During the time that April actively disciplined she thought that "it went really well. Elizabeth wanted my approval and she did want to get along

with me." The act of disciplining made April "feel closer to Elizabeth, because I was influencing her."

April perceived Bob's reaction to her disciplining as both non-supportive and undermining. Bob "didn't follow through. You know it was just 'Well April that's a bit harsh don't you think?' or he unintentionally undermined me, He didn't set out to undermine me, but he did."

"After a couple of years of trying," April came to realize that she had been invited to discipline because "that's the missing link. We need somebody to fill this gap, nobody's doing any discipline here April. Why don't you be the wicked stepmother and you're invited in to do this."

However without Bob's support April perceived herself "as the bitch. I was the one laying down the law. Ya I was the bad guy."

With that realization April "choose not to be in that role. Whoa, I'm not going to be the wicked stepmother. There's no benefit in this for me." Instead April moved to a consultant's position to Bob on the issue of discipline:

> These are your children. I'm willing to give you the information I think they need in order to become better children. I'm now going to stop being the bad parent because there's nothing in [it] for me, absolutely nothing. They'll hear it from you because you're the daddy but they won't hear it from me.

It appears that April moved towards the role described by Mary. However, when she let go of the disciplining Bob "did not pick it up." Therefore the stepchildren "don't do any chores around the house." Because of their lack of contribution to the home April has come to feel "a little resentful and a little distant" towards them.

April was invited by Bob to assume one of the major responsibilities of parenting - disciplining, while being denied the power of decision making and the joy of nurturing.

Laurel's experience of disciplining. Having gained from Tom at least some support Laurel moved ahead in her interactions with the stepchildren in the area of discipline.

Laurel described three incidents involving each of her three stepchildren, all within a rather short period of time. The most critical of these involved the oldest stepson, Alex. The process regarding its resolution highlights the essential dynamics of support and trust so clearly for this stepfamily that a brief discussion of this confrontation is necessary before addressing the incident between stepmom and stepdaughter.

Laurel and Alex had "a major fight." She perceived it to be a "power struggle." "It was over a little, little thing. Not doing the dishes when I asked him and walking away twice and it was very small but to me big because he directly undermined my authority."

Laurel felt that the stepson "had to decide that I was the authority ... I will not take second place, I will not be disrespected ... and if he wasn't prepared to decide that, I wanted him to leave."

Laurel and the stepson managed to resolve the altercation so that he "apologized" and "... chose to live by the rules and ... to live with us." They "ended up close and having a good time together."

Having resolved the conflict between herself and Alex, Laurel informed Tom of the incident:

> So I tell his Dad. His Dad having heard about this from me, where I said how angry I was and his Dad's comment was nothing about me but it was like "Poor Alex is having a rough time."

Laurel was upset that Tom didn't seem to appreciate how she might have felt. "I'm upset I think I told you about that and you sounded like you were on Alex's side. Oh, what about poor me, what about what I went through in that."

Laurel and Tom were able "to settle it," so that Laurel perceived Tom as being "supportive of (her)." As Laurel expresses it, "it's that important if he was on the kids side, we were in for major trouble." For Laurel, Tom's support and trust in her authority and discipline are absolutely central to her being able to remain in the stepfamily, "His Dad is going to have to support me or we're separated."

Subsequent to this incident of which every member of the stepfamily was aware, Laurel had her first major "blowout" with her stepdaughter.

Ann had been asked repeatedly by both Laurel and Tom to clean her room. "Her room was just a mess and she'd been told about it by me and her father and she hadn't taken care of it."

Finally Laurel:

> ...got mad at her about her room and Ann just blew and she went into a screaming fit. "You're always on me ..." Laurel responded by demanding a firm commitment as to when the room would be cleaned. "When are you going to do it?" "I'm going to do it today." "What time today?" "Now." "O.K." So she cleaned her room in just this mad fury -- and then fell 'asleep.'

Later Laurel and Ann were able to reconcile:

> I just said "Well you trust me enough to fight with me" and she apologized, and I said "Well thank you, and there's some things I probably could have done better and you were right about one thing."

Laurel does not refer to any involvement by Tom in this altercation or in a later one involving the younger stepson.

Creating a Boundary Around the Stepfamily

After listening to April's struggle for boundaries I had the opportunity to explore this issue with Mary in her second interview. April's and Mary's experiences regarding boundaries between the family units is presented below. This issue was not mentioned in Laurel's transcript. Unfortunately I was unable to reconnect with Laurel to explore this issue. However one possible explanation for the lack of information regarding boundary creation in this particular stepfamily might be due to the fact that these children had primary residence with their father.

April's experience of boundaries. At this stage of April's evolution, she perceived a need to create a space that belonged only to the members of the stepfamily:

> I wanted the kids to be able to be here with me and not have that relationship invaded. So it was for me personally and for the relationship [with the kids] and with Bob. I mean I didn't want the ex-wife always calling....

Towards that end April tackled the issue of boundaries between the two households. April recalled three poignant examples of boundary creation. They involved the exclusion of the biological mother from entering the stepfamily home, the prevention of daily dinner time phone conversations by the biological mother to the step-children, and the firing of the cleaning lady who cleaned in both homes. All three are presented below.

At the beginning of the stepfamily life April found that the ex-wife "was coming into my home on a regular basis. To check, to either get a pair of pajamas for [one of the stepchildren] or a sweater or a schoolbook. So she'd just march into my home."

While April found this "not acceptable" she expected Bob to deal with the situation because "she's your ex-wife."

From April's perspective the situation was exacerbated by Bob's giving his ex-wife permission to spend the day in the stepfamily home "cleaning out the closet for Elizabeth and looking at her clothes and what she needed to buy ..."

April's reaction to this:

> ...was to be absolutely furious. I said, "You have not heard me, you have not respected me and I can't stand this. I do not want that woman in my house." I said, "The problem is this is also my home or am I just an appendage here that doesn't count for anything.'"

April took firm control of the situation and:

> ...wrote a letter to [the ex-wife] and [I] dropped it off in the mail. I made very clear what my boundaries were, "You're not welcome to come into my house at any time unless I personally invite you. I hear that Bob is unable to tell you no, I am telling you no. This does not include the children. They are welcome to come and go anytime ... but I have limits and you are not invited to come to my house."

The second boundary incident involved the biological mother's repeated dinner-time phone calls:

> Then I spent the next year trying to extinguish her behavior of phoning every night at supper time. I have actually sat, you've got to hear this story, sat at my supper table where she phones and Bob is talking on the portable phone to her and she says "Let me talk to Elizabeth," then she talks to Mommy and then Alex talks to Mommy. Then after they hang up the phone I said "It was really nice to have mommy here for supper. Excuse me, but I don't want this happening any more." Now we take the phone off the hook, because there was no telling her not to phone at supper time, and Bob doesn't have the guts to say "Excuse me, but we're eating supper."

The third incident involved the cleaning lady:

> So this nice little German cleaning lady cleaned [the ex-wife's] house and our house because she had been with Elizabeth since she was born. And it was just like a Harlequin Romance, she won't iron any of my clothes; she would tell me how things should be done. She was bossing me around in my own house.

April left Canada on a trip and when she returned the following incident occurred:

> I came back home and [the cleaning lady] innocently says to me "Well April, the ex-wife and I were talking the other day. Did you have to pay your own flight? Did you get paid from work while you were on your leave of absence?" Anyway that night I said to Bob "Either the cleaning lady goes or I go. Two years of putting up with that shit is it. This is it and the reason she goes is not because she's not a good cleaning lady, it's because she also cleans for [the ex-wife]. I need more boundaries here! Oh, he couldn't do it, I said "I am more than willing to do it," Bob said "Oh no, I have to do it. She's been with us this long," and I said "You can have lunch with her every week Bob, you can go and see her at her house if you want, but she's not cleaning my house anymore." So we got that changed.

So April tried repeatedly to create some physical space in which the stepfamily members might be able to develop relationships.

<u>Mary's experience of boundaries</u>. For Mary's stepfamily there were two types of boundary issues. The first revolved around who controls the daughter's activities while she was in the stepfamily household.

Mary states:

> Richard's comment is "what we do in this family we do in this family. We decide what's important and what's not important, and what your

> mother decides in terms of her, their household I may like or I may not like but that's separate from [us]. We make the decisions in this house about how we do things and what we do including when you're with us. Your mother doesn't, in relationship to the other household and she makes some decisions that I don't like but I have to live with those and she has to live with what happens here. Including decisions that Mary makes about how we do things too.

The second type of boundary issue revolved around events such as holiday time and special occasions. These were a function of both families and therefore need to be negotiated.

Mary states:

> We were talking about basically how the biological mother influences to a large degree the other family. Even when you try and set up boundaries as to what decisions you make but just for instance take holiday times that all has to be negotiated [or] if some family event came about on a weekend that Susan wasn't suppose to be visiting that all had to be negotiated.

From Mary's perspective, if the stepfamily wanted to include Susan in their "family holidays" or "family celebrations" they became "dependent [upon] the biological mom to allow that to happen." By wanting the stepdaughter to be involved in the stepfamily's activities, the stepfamily became vulnerable to the influence of the biological mother.

Mary found in the early stage that she resented the fact that certain aspects of the stepfamily life were controlled or influenced by the biological mother:

> Early on I really resented the fact that this biological mom had so much power in terms of making decisions about what our family could and couldn't do and when we could do them and when we couldn't.

However, with the maturing of the stepdaughter "Susan's old enough to make her own choices" and the development of a "closer [relationship] between the two households" the handling of holiday time and special occasions have become less of an issue. The boundary issues between the two households which were at first aggravating, over time were resolved.

While both stepfamilies succeeded in creating boundaries there was a fundamental difference in how those boundaries were established. In April's stepfamily she was responsible for their implementation; in Mary's stepfamily it was the father. However whether or not this is significant to the general well-being of a stepfamily only further research will be able to determine.

Relationships

General relationships between stepmoms and stepdaughters. In the interactions above the stepmoms were trying to acquire the authority to discipline and make decisions regarding the stepchildren. As these issues were being addressed a relationship was developing simultaneously between the stepmoms and the stepdaughters. Below are the stepmom's perceptions of their relationship with their stepdaughter at this point in time. Two of the stepmothers described how these developing relationships were impacted by the biological parents. These impacts were described as significant enough to be included as part of this section.

Relationship between Mary and her stepdaughter. Generally Mary perceives the love between herself and her stepdaughter as having "evolved slowly." Susan had to work through from her perspective, the loyalty issues surrounding loving a stepmom and her own mother:

> It's that, especially for Susan there's that loyalty thing. To love stepmom meant not being loyal to her own mom. If she shows certain things towards me is that disloyal to her mother?

> As a consequence of the struggle over loyalty Mary says: [we] had to work at the love. Ya, we worked hard, I think that may be the difference. Susan and I have had to work at the love whereas in some ways love is given when it's your child.

There were many pitfalls to developing that love, not the least of which are the assumptions either individual might have regarding the others' needs and desires. Mary recalled a situation where she acted on an assumption regarding her stepdaughter's needs that turned out to be erroneous.

Mary did not want Susan to "feel as if we were trying to overwhelm her with this extended family, that she had a special place" or that "I [Mary] was trying to compete with her mom." To prevent this from happening, Mary would often "make people aware that Susan was my stepdaughter versus a biological daughter." However, over time it became apparent to the stepmom that "Susan [had] almost [a] desperate need to belong" and to be "totally accepted not only by her immediate family but by my parents, by my brother by my aunts, my cousins, my uncle." Mary discovered that the stepdaughter "didn't want that special place," she didn't want to be "made any different," she just wanted "to belong." In fact Mary's attempts to create a special place for her stepdaughter and not try to compete with the biological mother were seen by the stepdaughter "as me trying to push her away." While they were able to resolve this difference in perception, it is easy to see how non-verbal assumptions could negatively influence the developing relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter.

Other factors which Mary found influenced the ebb and flow of their relationship were the differences in their personalities, "the reality is that [we are] just different personalities," the state of the stepdaughter's health, "so I find when Susan has just been sick I'm very close to her because I mother her," and the developmental stage that the stepdaughter was in:

> I've come to the conclusion that teenagers are basically very self-centered people and that to a large degree their worlds revolve very much around themselves, and they don't have an awful lot of time for the people around them.

Mary summarizes the process surrounding the development of a relationship with her stepdaughter in this manner:

> Ya, there was a development with Susan, that in a sense is the underlying part, the one that goes through both of them. Like you negotiate in a sense with the dad. You negotiate as a step in a different way with the biological mom, but the thread that runs through all of those is the relationship with Susan.

Relationship between Laurel and her stepdaughter. Laurel perceives that there is a "real bond" between herself and Ann. This bond is based on three major components. The first is a sense of similarity:

> I think we're a lot alike. Like we're both chatty, I talk a lot, she talks a lot, we both enjoy a lot of the same things. So I feel very connected to her in the kind of person we are. We share a lot of values ... sometimes we're so much alike I can't believe you're not my own daughter.

The second are qualities such as respect, honesty, and trust that are integral parts of Laurel's personality and way of being in the world. Each of these contributed to the type of relationship that developed between Laurel and Ann:

> I know that she respects me. [Ann] can count on me for honesty. I am a very honest person, one of those people who are sometimes too honest. She can trust me, she can trust me in I think any dimension that you can think of in trust. To be honest, to care about her, to choose wisely about what confidences to divulge and which ones not [to]. Trusting me to have her best interests at heart even if I'm going against her.

The third component consisted of being an active participant in the stepdaughter's life. Laurel recalled teaching Ann to drive and she saw that, as an example of how the bond between them had developed:

> I took her to get her learners. I took her for her tests and we had that bond. I think all through her life that will be one of our bonds.... It's just priorities and she'll remember that. In terms of time I have a busy life and to give up that time for her to take the risks, you know, which is frightening at times and just do it. That was a bond and special for the two of us. Her appreciation was nice and her acknowledgement that I was a really good teacher for her.

Laurel's perception of an active participant is not simply that she taught her stepdaughter to drive. But rather Laurel took the time to consider how Ann learns and how Laurel could provide the best learning experience for her. "So I taught her knowing, figuring, watching and figuring that's how she needed to learn. [Then] I gave her those experiences." Within that effort on Laurel's part is a great deal of patience and understanding. Laurel recognizes that, "there's love between us it's, I don't know, it's shown in everyday life. We enjoy each other."

Relationship between Laurel, her stepdaughter and the biological mother. Laurel has also come to realize that she has quite a different concept of parenting than the biological mother. "I think as a mother in that situation I would be different than her own mother is. Some of the closeness, I would make opportunities [for that] with my daughter." While this difference was noted by Laurel in both the area of sexuality (Stage IV) and around the driving lessons, it apparently was such a conundrum for Laurel that she comments on the lack of closeness again in the second interview:

> Other ways like buying her clothes. Well I think that's part of mother/daughter closeness and some of the things I buy her are frankly for that reason. For us to have fun together and enjoy that dimension. Her mother though, I guess she's done it once, it really surprises me how little her mother's done that in the mother/daughter relationship. Bought her very very few pieces of clothing. Very very few and that surprises me. Her mother's not poverty stricken and that she wouldn't do that just for the closeness of mother/daughter.

However, there was for Laurel another aspect to the dynamics between stepmom, stepdaughter and biological mother. Laurel became aware that Ann was "modelling [herself] after her mother" and rejecting the stepmother's direct approach because she thought it was "too aggressive." Laurel "found that painful." However, she was able to deal with this pain by realizing that the stepchildren had four adult models to try out. They have both biological and stepparents "to learn different styles [from], and we're all different in our styles, to model after, and accept and reject and to try out."

In general, Laurel believes that "stepfamily relationship with the kids can only be good if the parents' relationship is good and solid."

Relationship between April and her stepdaughter. April's relationship with her stepdaughter has gone through a number of changes. As commented on in stage one, April had hoped that the relationship between herself and Elizabeth would be similar to a mother/daughter relationship. Due to the dynamics within this particular stepfamily as presented in Stages I, II and III, April had to let go of that dream. "The hope that I had started out with has diminished. So the enthusiasm that I started out with has changed." In letting go, April had to deal with the pain involved in that loss. "Ya, there's a loss and ... I feel a loss of value in Elizabeth's life. I've had a big need to be important in her life."

As well as losing her dream, April was excluded from any sense of power within the stepfamily:

> If there is anything I can say about being a stepmother, it's a very powerless role. You have no legitimate authority. I can influence I can do my best, I can state my piece, my plea, my request but when all is said and done I'm not the mom, I'm not the dad, I'm not the voice of authority and that's been the hardest.

This lack of authority for April not only was "very very hard. I actually have given up many times and it's been very painful" but caused her "to change [her] role and to see [herself] more as a friend than a parent...a loving extra adult...Ya, I think I see myself more as an aunt in the family. Like I am in the family but not in an authoritative position."

From this new position April enjoyed the times she had the stepchildren to herself. "I capitalize on them [times together] we do something neat for supper, go out for pizza or go to a movie, etc...."

As April adjusted to this new role she had to abandon the fantasies she had had about a mother/daughter relationship. "I tried to really encourage her to be, to cook and be in the kitchen with me but that's my need and not hers." As April let go of that dream she found that Elizabeth would come and talk to her about her period, clothes, school work and other activities. These moments "had to be at Elizabeth's initiative and her timing. I've just been open to it. I'm just simply there for her at that time." As April let go of her expectations and was open to interacting with her stepdaughter on her terms, in her areas of interest, the relationship deepened.

Relationship between April, her stepdaughter and the biological parents. April perceived the biological parents as having a very clear concept of what her role was in the stepfamily:

> I was just suppose to sort of be there just be around, minimal impact clean the kitchen, I'm being facetious a bit. Be there so when Bob and his two children sit down for dinner, there's a mother role there. So he wanted another parent there and that was my role but certainly only two percent of activity allowed in this role.

As well as the above perception April perceived the biological parents as leaning heavily on the stepchildren for emotional support:

> Bob is very needy and is very codependent on his children. He really leans on them a lot, sucks up to them kind of thing, and [the ex-wife] does exactly the same thing. She went through a divorce and a new boyfriend and went through all kinds of stuff. [The stepchildren] knew all about it, every detail and I think that's inappropriate. The kids were protecting mom. They needed to go over there to be with Mom because Mom was sad. They were into looking after Mom. Then they came over to our house and they look after Dad.

April's perception that the stepchildren were caretakers for their parents influenced how she chose to interact with them. "I didn't want to be this muddled up and share that with the kids. So for the kids I was pretty well strong and capable and they see me that way so they can be into their feelings."

Over time, April became the neutral person that the stepchildren can turn to to discuss the interactions they saw between their biological parents:

> They check me out about, "Well what do you think about Mom, this and that?" and "What do you think about Dad when he does this and that?" They're using me as the neutral person I've become I think in this family.

April helps the stepchildren to understand what is and is not their responsibility:

Well, Mom and Dad had those disagreements long before you were born and they're still continuing. This does not relate to you, this is their stuff, you know. As a new wife coming on board, I can still see them playing their old games that they did for years and none of us can stop them. Not me, not you and only they can stop it and that's their responsibility.

Chapter IV

Results of the Study: Four Stages

Stage IV: A Second Critical Event and Its Effects

Mary's Critical Incident

The Effect on Mary's Stepfamily
- Discipline
- Present relationships

Laurel's Critical Incident

The Effect on Laurel's Stepfamily
- Present relationships
- Laurel's final story

April's Critical Incident

The Effect on April's Stepfamily
- The shift
- New strategy for relationship development
- Effects of the new strategy on relationships
- Present general stepfamily dynamics

Stage IV: A Second Critical Event and Its Effects

Having gained in differing degrees some authority in their respective stepfamilies, the stepmoms' lives continued much as presented at the end of stage three.

Thus, Mary continued to nurture her stepdaughter and to function in the areas of decision making and discipline in an interactional pattern that was comfortable for both herself and Richard. Laurel also continued to nurture her stepdaughter. However, it was only through repeated confrontations with Tom in the area of decision making and discipline that Laurel was able to gradually acquire authority over the stepchildren and loyalty from Tom . April continued to struggle for the right to nurture her stepdaughter. However April began to abandon interacting with her stepdaughter in the areas of discipline and decision making. This change in her interactional pattern caused April to redefine her role in relationship to her stepdaughter.

The time spent in this stage varied. Mary continued in this manner for fourteen years, while April and Laurel seemed to be in this stage for approximately four years. Eventually a situation occurred which was powerful enough to significantly change the dynamics in each stepfamily. These incidents, and their effect on the stepfamilies comprise stage four and are discussed below.

Mary's Critical Incident

Although a number of life events such as the birth of a child and a serious illness had occurred in Mary's stepfamily, they were in and of themselves not crucial enough to change the established relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter. However, when Susan at the age of sixteen chose to come and live in the stepfamily, Mary was aware that there

needed to be a change in the relationship between herself and her stepdaughter. "She and I had to establish, re-establish in some way a relationship and ways of dealing with one another." The incident that precipitated this change was described by Mary as follows:

> Sometimes when Susan had her friends over it seemed to me that there was a tendency to put me down or take me for granted, "Mary get us a snack, Mary do this," that I was the housekeeper in terms of things and this really bothered me.

Following the established interactional pattern between herself and Richard, "[Mary] talked with Richard about that and he said 'Well I'll talk to Susan.'"

However, Mary decided to instigate a change for the following individual and stepfamily reasons. These reasons were:

1. "I grew up in a household where my father did the disciplining. It was, 'Wait till your dad comes home' and 'I didn't want that' in this stepfamily."

2. "Because of the growing relationship I have with [my son], a strong relationship, I wanted that relationship with Susan as well"

3. "I decided I wanted to be more involved in Susan's life now that she's living with us and was part of the family"

4. "With my stepdaughter coming I put more energy specifically into making this work in terms of the whole thing. I saw that very much as my role. I wanted to be very much a primary player"

5. "Then Richard's illness for two years. I had to at times do some of the disciplining. I suspect I took on a lot of the joint roles when he was ill."

6. "I would say its more pragmatic. It's just that she's here. It's very hard not to be involved on a day to day basis."

Thus instead of relying on Richard to intervene for her, Mary chose to address the issue directly with the stepdaughter:

> No this is between Susan and I and we've got to sort it out. I was uncomfortable I was really uptight about talking to [her] about this but felt it was really important. I had to deal with her and find out what was going on because it was me that was feeling like the housekeeper. It's just that I think I had always sort of resented it from that first time she said, you know "Let's pretend. My Mommy's my Mommy, my Daddy's my Daddy and you're the housekeeper."

Mary was able to tell her stepdaughter directly:

> When you do that with your friends it makes me feel like the wicked old stepmother. That you don't feel it's appropriate in front of your friends to like me or show the affection that on a normal basis I feel that we have."

The stepdaughter was shocked by Mary's perception. "Oh, there's no way. There is no difference. I treat you the same way that I treat my Mom. I love you and I love my Mother."

The direct confrontation involved in this incident became a catalyst for change. "So we sat down and talked about it, we bawled together. We went through quite a catharsis."

It is interesting that for Mary the critical incident was not in the parenting realm at all but rather of a interpersonal nature. The resolution of this confrontation seems to have clarified for both Mary and Susan the depth or level of intimacy between them. From here we will see how this change affects the dynamics in the stepfamily.

The Effect on Mary's Stepfamily

Discipline. As noted in stage one Mary was aware that Richard had difficulty sharing the disciplining of his daughter. Therefore they developed

a process whereby Richard dealt with the disciplinary issues with Mary acting as a consultant. It is in this sensitive area that the effect of the change in the interactional pattern between Mary and Susan is most clearly delineated.

Mary recalled an incident regarding discipline shortly after her stepdaughter had moved in, and following the incident already described:

> Whereas this fall when Susan came up, it happened to be that I was the one that observed a behavior and Richard didn't. So Susan and I came to Richard together to explain the situation and how we saw it. And then at this point we said to Susan "Dad and I need some time together to talk this over and to cool down a bit. Give us half an hour and then we will get together again and talk about it, as to what kind of discipline would be in place." I was more directly involved in terms of setting up the discipline.

Mary herself perceives this new approach that includes all three of them:

> The next stepping stone, in terms of the stepmothering role is that move from the consultant to a very active definite person in terms of Richard and I [dealing] with Susan together on a face to face basis.
>
> This new approach was welcomed firstly by Richard:
>
> I said to Richard "I don't want to be a second player. I want to be part of it, all the time," and he said "Great." Richard went on to comment, "It's ideal if we do [discipline] together but if I'm busy it's OK for you [the stepmom] to do it, so go ahead."

As well as gaining Richard's support for her new role Mary perceives her stepdaughter as respecting her more. "As I'm doing it [disciplining] more, Susan respects me more." Mary discovers also that the stepdaughter finds "it's sometimes more comfortable to deal with you than with dad on

some of the discipline kinds of things." Both Richard and Susan had in their own ways given Mary permission and authority to discipline.

Mary feels that "it is important that Susan and I build our own relationship that doesn't necessarily involve Richard . If it's a problem between Susan and I, it's up to us to resolve it." Mary is quite protective of her new role, when Richard happens to return to the old pattern. "He still in some ways does this role and just the other day I said to Richard when something came up, 'Look I'm either in or I'm out. If' meaning if I'm in then it's the whole bag.'"

In conclusion, Mary comments:

> It's interesting because just as we are talking, somehow that gave me a comfortable feeling "Hey I can, I don't have to be protective from the confrontation now. I'm not going to scare you away, it's ok. You belong with us. It's ok for me to discipline you now, because I feel that I have been truly accepted as your stepmom," maybe that's it. I didn't think about that until we were talking. But it's almost her statement in saying "Hey I love you unconditionally."

Present relationships. Just as the move by the stepdaughter from the biological mother's home to the stepfamily's had a major impact in the area of discipline so this move dramatically affects the roles, responsibilities and ultimately the relationships among the individuals involved with the stepdaughter.

Mary states:

> In some ways I've taken over some of the disciplining kinds of things; and I see in a sense the biological mom has almost taken over a bit of the role that I had before because Susan's only there on weekends and on sort of holiday things. There isn't the need to discipline her very much. So in some ways it means that Susan and her mom can just

spend some really close fun times together. There doesn't have to be the clashes over when does she have to be home, when does she have to do her homework, can she go out with this boy, or does she not go out with that group of people? That has become her dad's and my role in the sense of having to deal with day to day discipline. I say discipline and it's not discipline, but the kinds of decisions that you have to make as a parent that sometimes teenagers rebel against. Her mom in some ways doesn't have to do a lot of that now and so in some ways I see almost a closer relationship that Susan talks about between her and her mom. They've really had some close times together now. So that may help alleviate the fact that Susan isn't with her mom as much, because when they do spend time together they really enjoy one another's company.

Each adult in the stepdaughter's life has contributed to the shift in roles and responsibilities presented above. It appears that the mothering role has followed the stepdaughter. Not only are both decision-making and disciplining the responsibility of the adults in the stepfamily now, but the biological mother seems to have endorsed that shift. From Mary's perspective the biological mother has "stepped back. It's almost as if she's handed over the mothering role, in some ways the discipline has been transferred, any decisions in terms of disciplining are now Tom's and mine."

This shift has not only occurred among the adults, the stepdaughter has also been an active participant. Susan has managed within her own mind to "see her biological mom as her mom but on the other hand seems more and more comfortable in [accepting] the mothering-role as being here" with Mary. The loyalty issue around having a biological mother and a stepmother "seem [to be] worked through." Thus, when the stepdaughter introduces the stepmom "to her friends as her stepmom, it often slips to mom these days." After just such a slip, the stepdaughter, herself stated, "I guess that's OK, you're sort of like my mom now."

Through conversations with the stepdaughter Mary perceives that this shift has affected the biological mother/daughter relationship as well. Mary related to me the following comments from Susan regarding this issue:

> Well my mom keeps trying to be friends with me. I keep telling her that I'm not her friend; she's my mom and I'm her daughter, and I don't want to be her best friend sort of thing.

Now that the stepdaughter has come to live in the stepfamily Mary found herself having to deal with her feelings regarding the relationship between mother and daughter:

> I find myself, I guess a little hurt when she talks a lot of really warm kinds of intimate discussions that she has with her mom. And there are times you know particularly if Susan and I have had sort of an off time; that if she comes back and says something like that then I'll feel a little hurt.

Even while she is feeling hurt however Mary can acknowledge that, "This is good, this is right, this is what should be happening."

Mary has come to realize that those "intimate discussions" with the stepdaughter are more a function of being in the "right time and place" for all the adults in her life.

In summary Mary perceives life in a stepfamily as being "not a static thing. You don't reach something and then stay. It seems like it's changing, like you've reached a plateau. You go for a while and then it evolves." Certainly the recent shifts in roles among the adults in the stepdaughter's life, validate that perspective.

Laurel's Critical Incident

The critical incident that changed the relationships in Laurel's stepfamily involved the youngest stepson, Chris. Due to Laurel's concerns regarding confidentiality the incident itself will not be identified. Instead

Laurel's assumptions and interactions before the incident and how they changed because of it will be presented:

> There was this painful incident with the youngest stepson. Something very painful, we all had to work through, and that has changed our system in that until then I did hold back a lot of things.

From Laurel's perception, before this incident she held back from getting too involved in certain aspects of the stepchildren's lives for two reasons.

The first was out of respect and consideration for the biological mother and the needs of the stepchildren:

> There were areas I use to think that's for the parents. I'll stay out of this and I thought it was respect and I thought it was best for the child. I don't want to confuse them. I thought that well this is one area where I think it should be mother and daughter not stepmother and daughter and if I took it, it was like depriving her [the biological mother] of something with her daughter.

The second reason Laurel held back was rooted in her fear of criticism from either biological parent. For example, Laurel's values especially around sexuality are so different from the biological parents that to voice them would leave her vulnerable to criticism. "I used to think that well I guess I wouldn't risk, [expressing my views on sexuality] for fear of being criticized by Tom or the natural mom."

Before the incident Laurel's fear of criticism from the biological parents, her desire not to confuse the stepchildren, her belief that certain areas of the stepchildren's lives were the prerogative of the biological parents all combined to cause Laurel to hold back in her interactions with the stepchildren. However, this incident caused Laurel to re-evaluate those assumptions and beliefs. "Ya and it was so involving and so important that

I had to think through both my level of involvement and my assumptions about what their mother would do and risk criticism from Tom." Laurel has come to believe that she was the "best one to handle" certain issues with the stepchildren. This realization engendered a deeper sense of responsibility that encouraged Laurel to deal with her fear of criticism from Tom:

> I realized that if I didn't do some of these things with the kid[s] I was letting him [them] down. The basic conclusion that I came to is that I had let them down by not being involved and not risking. It's more they need me. It's my responsibility as a person who generally [has] good judgement to risk that kind of conflict with Tom.

This incident was so powerful that it forced Laurel to recognize, evaluate, and change her way of interacting as a stepmom.

The Effect on Laurel's Stepfamily

Present relationship. As noted by Laurel the incident regarding the stepson changed the stepfamily's system. For Laurel this change involved a reassessment of her attitude regarding the role of a stepmom. Whereas before she held back in certain areas, such as sexuality she intends now to be involved in every aspect of the stepchildren's lives. "If the [stepdaughter] wants to tell me that she's got that [information] from her mother and she'd rather not have it [from me], or the mother wants to phone me and say it, that would be OK." However, "If the dad asks me to back out, we'll talk about it. I wouldn't accept it as easily as I would of a year ago."

Over the years, Laurel's perception of her role in relationship to her stepchildren has changed from being "startled that [the stepdaughter] would think of me as a mother figure," [Stage I] acknowledging that as "their stepmother I do all the mothering things that a mother does," [Stage I] to finally considering herself "mostly like a parent" [Stage IV].

Laurel's final story. At the end of the second interview Laurel recounted an incident that illustrated for her the incredible degree of shift there had been in the stepfamily relationships. Because of this incident's significance for Laurel, it seemed appropriate to place it here at the end of her story.

"When Tom was a single parent the kids went into his room and if there was something they wanted they took it." While Laurel "could see the functionality" of this for a single parent household "she was uncomfortable with it; she wanted more boundaries." Thus when Laurel and Tom married they created their own personal space by building an addition to the house.

Recently:

> [Chris and a friend] went into our room after school and I had a huge reaction to that. [They] ate some chocolates [that] had been given especially to me by a friend. In their mind that was quite innocent [but it] really got me.

Laurel confronted Chris:

> we had about an hour and a half confrontation over this... but he'd tuned out I guess because the next night he went into our room again. Well I was furious. I expected that Tom would be supportive of my feelings but I expected that his own feelings would be different. He would just say "So, I know that's how you react: so he went in our room" and that's the way he would of been two years ago.

However Tom apparently had changed:

> He said "I'm pissed off too. I don't want him in our room when we're not there" and he sat down and told him, "OK, now there's a rule. Don't go in our room when we're not there." Both of us had the same feelings of being invaded and that surprised me.

For Laurel this incident illustrates a major shift in Tom's interactional patterns. "He's gotten used [to it] too and likes the sense of distance and boundaries from the kids." Laurel finds this both "surpris[ing], I didn't know that he's at the same place" and "comfort[ing] because then I don't feel so alone."

With Laurel's help Tom has been able to create new interactional patterns with his children which incorporated the development of different boundaries and the integration of a stepmother.

April's Critical Incident

April was hurt and frustrated by the constraints placed upon her in the stepmothers role by the biological parents. Nevertheless she had up to this point continued to try to be involved in her stepchildren's lives. However, that process was changed for April by the incident below:

> I can tell you what event happened that made me really pull back, I just remember it. It was a weekend I'm taking my Masters Program and Bob had to go the States on business. The ex-wife was working and so I had the children. I had a major paper that was due but I said sure I love having the kids but except this weekend I was writing a paper. [Then] The stepdaughter said" [Mom's] not working. [Mom and her husband] are going horseback riding. [They] needed to get away." Bob knew this and had led me to believe that she was working and would I take the kids. Well I phoned him long distance and screamed and yelled at him and said "I feel totally disregarded again, undervalued. It doesn't matter that I have a paper to write."

This incident caused April to redirect her emotional energy away from the members of the stepfamily and towards herself:

> But that made me very, very angry. I think that's when I started taking care of myself even more. It's my anger at Bob, so I distanced from the kids. It's that kind of shit that's been going on.

While this situation was resolved so that April's schedule is considered by Bob before the stepchildren are left with her, "[The ex-wife] and I are trying to work out a schedule and here we're both away. How will this work for you?" There remains, at least from April's perspective, the issue of her place in the stepfamily. "I've said to Bob, 'The kids come first and then there is [the ex-wife] and right next to [her] is your work and somewhere after that I fit in.'"

This incident caused April to perceive the reality of her role as a stepmom in this stepfamily.

The Effect on April's Stepfamily

Up until the incident noted above April was still trying to play an active role in her stepchildren's lives. However this incident was so powerful that it caused her to reassess her relationships and interactions with both of her stepchildren. The outcome of that re-evaluation was that April continued to withdraw from trying to develop a relationship with the stepchildren as a "parent." Instead she focused on developing a relationship with them in the area created by the dynamics between biological parents and the stepchildren. In that area April was able to be the supportive neutral person that the stepchildren could turn to when confused or angry regarding their biological parents. April recalled:

> Elizabeth was saying "Mom has been crying and been really upset" and I said "Well, I think life's been pretty tough lately for your mom, you know her second marriage lasted four years and now she's into another relationship. She's actually now engaged to be married again and that's hard when your life has had so many changes."

However over time the dynamics between the stepmom and stepdaughter developed to include intimacy and the partial acceptance by the stepdaughter of April's right to guide her. The evolution of that shift and the development of this relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter are presented below.

The shift. While April's immediate reaction to the critical incident was one of anger as noted above it was followed by a pulling back, a distancing from the stepchildren:

> Right now I actually do very little with Elizabeth. We have meals together she sort of checks in and out. I have pulled back, there's still part of me that stays held back. It feels distant. It feels like there's distance between me and the kids and it actually feels like I've closed down and not them.

The degree of that distancing is realized when April states, "So parenting the children is one thing I've given up as part of survival too. It wasn't that rewarding anyway." It is interesting to note the correlation between April's perception of giving up parenting with the previously described failures to achieve the support of Bob in the area of discipline and decision making.

Even while April perceives she is withdrawing as a parent, she still remains available to Elizabeth when she wants to share, "I am [in a play] you've got to come and see it. So I'm invited in and I go." It appears that April's withdrawal is quite specific, in that she has withdrawn from disciplining and decision making and yet is still available to be a part of her stepdaughter's life when asked. However, there is a certain oscillating quality here. April, out of concern for her stepdaughter, still offers Bob direction around rules. "So I still feed Bob a bit of information here and there occasionally because I don't want Elizabeth getting into a lot of trouble."

It is interesting to note that both Laurel and April describe "support" for their stepchildren in regards to the dissidence between the divorced biological parents. However for Laurel this was a minor process; while for April it became the major avenue for developing a relationship between herself and her stepdaughter.

New strategy for relationship development. As April withdraw from trying to parent her stepchildren she developed a new strategy for interacting with them:

> I think I need to be patient I think that my strategy of not pushing and not working too hard on it is a good one. Just being myself and being natural and letting evolve what evolves.

Within that new approach April was able to identify certain behaviors that facilitated relationship development:

> Certainly I made a rule for myself not to be judgemental and not to get into my own issues. I can do that with my girlfriends, I don't do that with the children, and just sort of stay neutral. I encourage them to talk more. So, I am quite honest with them in a quite a loving kind way and we have really good talks and we talk about things that are important in life.

Again it is possible to recognize in April's new approach behaviors that are similar to those identified by Laurel and Mary earlier in their processes.

Effects of the new strategy on relationships. April's new strategy affected herself, the relationship between herself and her stepdaughter, and the relationship between biological parents and the stepchildren. Each of these is commented on below.

April found that the change in approach to interacting with her stepchildren gave her the opportunity to reflect on what might have been her psychological needs in the past and how they might have influenced her attempts to develop a relationship with her stepdaughter:

> I have a hunch I started out wanting to be codependent you know, wanting to be over involved and wanting to be really important and valued by them and looked up to; you know what kids can do for your ego. Maybe this is healthy for them and for me.

Regarding her relationship with the stepchildren April is aware of two perspectives. The first is her own comfort level regarding her relationship with them:

> What's working is starting to really feel good to me. I think I'm going to come out on the sunnyside of it, in that I'm going to be special to those kids regardless of what mom and dad do. I can tell you for sure that both kids know I love them. Even if I don't stay in this marriage I'll still have a special place with these kids.

The second perspective is the awareness that April has achieved the right to set limits for the stepdaughter. Interestingly this right was negotiated directly between the stepmom and the stepdaughter:

> When we went away Elizabeth wanted to stay home alone for a weekend, I had a great deal of trouble with that, because these kids invite other kids over and then before you know it there's too many kids there. So I sat down and I had this talk with her by myself and I said "Why don't you invite [your girlfriend] over and the two of you stay together for the whole weekend" and she was fine with that. This was great she just wanted some freedom just being home alone and yet she knew the boundaries. So I just sort of laid that down. And she followed through, and it was great. I feel because I haven't been laying down the law all of the time that when I do say something [it's] OK. April that's alright.

Through this new approach April has gained from the stepdaughter the right to have authority over her. What April could not obtain from the biological parents she finally achieved directly from the stepdaughter.

April believes that she has "saved [the stepchildren] from some trauma" by modelling the creation of boundaries as a way to deal with the invasive nature of both biological parents:

> I had to say to Bob in front of the kids "Dad you need to tell Peter and Elizabeth that you're grown up and that you and I can look after our own of feelings. They don't have to take care of us, even if we're upset and it's OK that we're upset. It's not their fault. It's OK that they see it but they don't have to solve our problems. These are adult problems."

Similarly one time Elizabeth:

> ... came running over crying because mom wouldn't let her go to a certain party or something and then the doorbell rang. I said "That will be your mother" she said "April you go talk to her." I said "She's your Mom you can handle this. You just tell her how you feel. You can do this. I'll be right here, you can come back any time." So she did.

Present general stepfamily dynamics. In this final section April comments on how she sees her role in the stepfamily, the present dynamics between the biological parents and her relationship with Bob. Each of these topics is presented below.

April defines her role in the stepfamily:

> as almost like an outsider to the nuclear family of the four of them, an outsider who loves them, and maybe has a better more objective perspective on what's happening in this family. Because even as angry as I can get with both Bob and [the ex- wife], I could kill them both, I can get so mad, but when I talk to these two children I really just see

> two beautiful children that I really love, who's had to live with these two folks fighting over them, and I just love them. Somehow I don't need to protect [the ex-wife], I don't need to protect Bob, I just need to do what's best for these two kids, because they're really neat kids.

In the statement above April not only defines her role as outside of the stepfamily, but indicates that there is at least in her mind, still a "nuclear family of four." April, does not perceive herself as a member of that family.

While April acknowledges that her relationship to the stepdaughter has "change[d] and progress[ed]," the interactions between the biological parents are:

> very much the same...Because now the mother is getting remarried and buying a beautiful, huge $220,000 home so last week, as the kids came to our place mother phoned for Elizabeth to come over and see her new diamond ring. Mother phoned to get kids to see their new rooms in their new house. Mother phoned to have the kids come and babysit because the man she's marrying has little kids, so could Elizabeth come and babysit. So the week that the children were at our house they went to their mothers every night and Bob would even drive them over there to facilitate it for [his ex-wife].

April perceives that Bob is "feeling left out" and is "still involved" in his ex-wife's life. April's reaction to this is "sort of a resentful resignation."

From April's perception the relationship between Bob and herself has been negatively affected by "the fighting, ex-wife, the kids and his work," to the point that April has given up "pursuing intimacy." She describes her relationship with Bob below:

> Partners is probably a good word. I'm afraid in all of this that I feel a bit scared and I've let go a lot, and the word facade fits in very well to this relationship I'm in right now, my hearts not in it. When the two of

us are together it's relaxing and easy. We're good friends, we talk about anything, we have similar interests. But as for him and I, I would say on a scale of 0 to 10 it's about a 4. It's not totally joyous or satisfying it's just OK. So, and part of that could be me. I've let go quite a bit, I have lost energy and interest in really pursuing intimacy and having impact and really getting somewhere. It's just fighting and [the ex-wife] and the kids and his work and all of that just hasn't been worth my while. I may get energy for that later, I may not, I don't know.

Chapter V

Final Discussions

The Model

- Stage I
- Stage II
- Stage III
- Stage IV

The Model in Relation to Other Current Research

Practical Implications of the Model

- Structural Family Therapy
  - Boundary
  - Alignment
  - Power
- The Model's Themes in Relationship to Structural Family Therapy

Factors to Be Considered Regarding the Research

Possible Directions of Future Research

Chapter V

Final Discussions

Chapter V consists of a description of the model that has arisen out the data presented in Chapter IV. This model is then considered in relationship to other current research in the field of re-married families. The possible practical implications and limitations of this model will be discussed in relationship to the area of family therapy. The chapter closes by speculating on possible directions for future research.

The Model

The model presented below is based on the data from three stepmoms. While I believe the model to be an accurate reflection of their processes, there is the realization that their experiences do not represent the total world of stepmothers. However, what the model does represent is the world of these three stepmoms, and possibly elements of other stepmothers' experiences. Further research on a larger population would be required to confirm or repudiate that possibility. The presentation of the model below is done with the realization that the model is a tentative working document, and not a fully developed theory. The language used in the presentation is meant to highlight this uncertainty.

The data indicate that there are three basic themes in this study. The first theme is the desire on the part of the stepmom to develop a "parent-like" relationship with the stepdaughter. The second is the stepmom's need for the father's support and trust in her interactions with his children. The third theme is the need to filter the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter through the biological mother. As the stepmom follows an evolutionary path through these themes a process emerges. This process has stages in which various issues predominate. These issues are

the vehicles through which the themes are played out. Theme one seems to predominate in Stage I; theme two in Stage II. However by the time the stepfamily reaches Stage III, all themes are present. In the subsequent paragraphs these themes will be followed through the stages.

Stage I

The first stage is generally characterized by the early interactions between stepfamily members and more specifically those interactions that revolve around the budding stepmom/stepdaughter relationship (theme one). The early interactions between stepmom and stepdaughter are noteworthy in that they do not include any comments regarding negative emotions towards the stepdaughter. Instead the information received indicates only supportive and nurturing interactions. I describe this behavior in the study as the "good-mother" role. I speculate that this role has both positive and negative aspects. It is possible that the "good-mother" role is beneficial to the development of the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter in that it lays down a foundation of positive interactions. However it appears that it can be detrimental in that it prevents the stepmom from expressing her full range of emotional reactions to the stepdaughter thereby blocking an authentic relationship. Part of the rationale for this speculation is found in Laurel's recycled first request for change (Chapter II) and Mary's second request for change (Chapter IV).

While theme one predominates in this stage, the other two themes are also present. Thus the second theme, the stepmom's need for the father's support and trust in her interactions with his children is also apparent in stage one. These factors (support and trust) were either present or absent in the father's reaction to the stepmom's nurturing behaviors. These first reactions seem significant because they appear to indicate the degree of trust and support that is available to the stepmoms in these early days.

From the data, it appears that the more the fathers are able to whole-heartedly support the budding relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter, the easier it is for the relationship to develop.

Elements of the third theme, the need to filter the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter through the biological mother, are tentatively introduced in this first stage as well. The biological mothers' attempts to influence the relationship vary from no attempts at all to dictating which activities could or could not occur between stepmom and stepdaughter. Interestingly, the degree to which this influence impacts on the relationship seems to be determined by the father's response (supportive or non-supportive) to the stepmom's interactions with his daughter.

It appears that the degree of the father's support and trust in the stepmom is crucial to both the development of the "parent- like" relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter, and the amount of influence the biological mother will have on that relationship. This perspective seems to be born out in Stage II, where the central concern is gaining the father's support and trust.

Stage II

The second stage is dominated by theme two: the stepmom's need for the father's support and trust in her interactions with his children. It appears that to ascertain the degree of support and trust available from the fathers, all three stepmoms request a change in either a father/daughter behavior or in another structure in the stepfamily. Through the conversations with the stepmoms and the reluctant behavior on the part of the fathers to meet this request for change, it appears that making this change was difficult for all three fathers. Be that as it may, each father's response to the request for change appears to be treated by the stepmom as a measure of the degree of support and trust she could expect from him.

If the fathers are able to meet the stepmoms need for support and trust two factors seem to occur. Firstly the stepmoms seem to feel validated in their role in the stepfamily. Secondly the relationships between members of the stepfamily, specifically those between the stepmom and the stepdaughter, seem to continue to grow. It appears that the stepmoms not only obtain the father's support and trust in their interactions with the stepdaughter but they appear to also realize at some level the right to begin to be their authentic self in those interactions. The data reveal that over time those stepmoms that got the fathers' support and trust seem to be able to start to move away from the straight-jacket of the "good-mother" role and build a relationship with their stepdaughter based on their authentic selves. However, if the fathers are unable to meet the stepmoms' need for support and trust, the dynamic process within the stepfamily appears to stall. It appears that this theme is so important to the stepmoms that they recycle it through the everyday events of family living. This recycling of the theme through general stepfamily events was used by two of the stepmoms. Laurel seems to find it at least partially successful, while April found that she was unable at this point to gain the degree of support and trust she felt she needed from the father. Theme two appears to be extremely important in the building of a "parent-like" relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter. Eventually the stepmoms, with whatever degree of support and trust they have obtained, are propelled on to Stage III by the evolving dynamics within the stepfamily.

Theme three is not discussed in Stage II because of its general lack of appearance in the relevant data.

Stage III

Stage III is complex in that it is an interplay of all three themes through a number of possible continuous issues, such as decision-making,

discipline, and boundaries. From the data in Stage I, it seems that the fathers in the study had a historical process or pattern for dealing with these issues. It appears that it is these patterns of interactions that need to be renegotiated with the stepmoms. As the fathers provide support and trust for the stepmoms around these issues, new patterns of relating evolve. The emergence of these new patterns seems to indicate a shift of allegiance on the part of the father from the old patterns to his new wife and the evolving patterns. This shift in allegiance may occur relatively easily through one or two incidents, or it may occur in increments through a series of events, or it may not occur at all. However, it seems that if gains in support and trust are made on one issue, those gains influence the amount of support and trust available to the stepmoms on other issues.

This shift in allegiance seems to significantly influence the development of the relationship between the stepmom and the stepdaughter and the creation of boundaries between the two families. It appears that through the fathers' support and trust, the stepmoms seem to be more authentic in their interactions with their stepdaughters and to feel more secure in their "parent-like" role. As well, the father's overt support and trust of the stepmom appears to send a clear message to the stepmom, to the stepdaughter, and to the biological mother regarding where the father's loyalties lay. In general, it appears that the father's shift in allegiance facilitates the development of a bond between the stepmom and the stepdaughter and solidifies the boundaries around the stepfamily.

However if the father is unable to support and trust the stepmom and thus ultimately unable to shift his allegiance as in April's case, it appears that the biological mother has access through the old patterns around decision-making and discipline to the dynamic within the stepfamily. This

access appears to influence the type of relationship that develops between stepmom and stepdaughter and the creation of boundaries.

In April's stepfamily where this shift in allegiance did not appear to occur the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter did not develop into a "parent-like" relationship. The parent role is maintained by the biological parents. April finds herself in a relationship with her stepdaughter that she describes as being like a favorite "aunt." In that role April may offer support. However the acceptance of that support seems to be at her stepdaughter's initiation. At this point, April is rarely involved in disciplining or decision-making. These areas appear to remain the total prerogative of the biological parents.

It appears that the continued strong relationship between the biological parents regarding issues such as discipline and decision-making seems to create permeable boundaries between the two families. This type of boundary was difficult for April, and might be similar for other stepmoms.

While the stepmom may try to initiate a more "parent-like" relationship with the stepdaughter and firmer boundaries between the two families, it appears that without the father's support and trust she has very little success. Over time a balance occurs between the major players which may or may not be satisfactory to the stepmom. This balance is quite entrenched. As will be shown in Stage IV, it takes a major life event to shift that balance.

Stage IV

As intimated above, by the end of Stage III all three themes seem to have solidified into a pattern. That pattern is one in which by differing degrees the stepmoms have achieved their joint goals of a "parent-like" relationship with the stepdaughter, and the father's support and trust. In Stage IV each stepfamily encounters a major life event that causes the

balance noted above to become unstable. During this period of instability the relationships within the stepfamily may change. In Mary and Laurel's stepfamilies the relationship between the stepmoms and stepdaughters appears to have deepened. As outlined in Chapter IV, Stage IV, the stepmoms and the stepdaughters acknowledge their love for each other. The stepmoms are no longer afraid of losing their stepdaughters. They are now ready to be totally involved. There is a sense on the part of these stepmoms of no longer needing the father's support or trust for the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter to flourish. The stepmoms are also no longer influenced by concerns for the biological mothers. It is as if they now have full parental rights. These rights appear to be given to them by the biological parents and the stepdaughters. This evolution towards a deeper relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter appears to be a natural evolution for them based on the interactions in the previous stages.

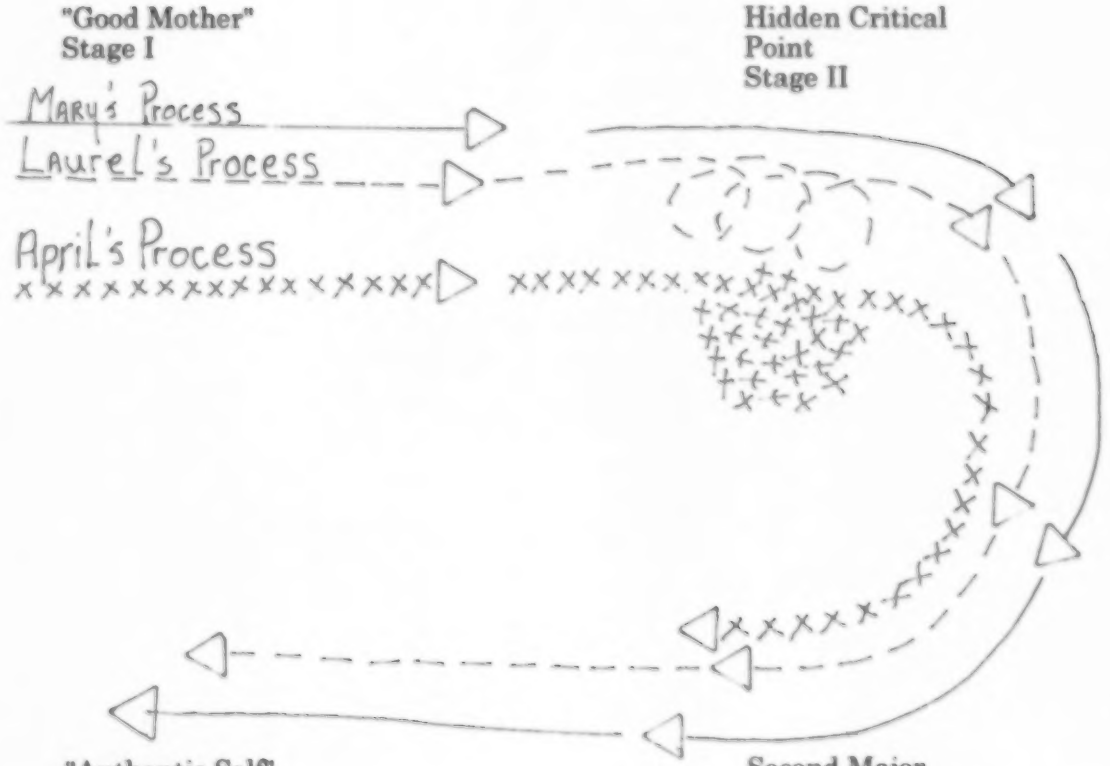
April, the stepmom who was unable to achieve the support and trust she needed from the father, also found her relationship to her stepdaughter changed when a major life event occurred. It appears that the life event caused the stepmom to give up the last remnants of hope of being involved with her stepdaughter in a "parent-like" role. April was then able to ascertain the role that was available to her and concentrate on developing it. Over time April found that what had appeared as a somewhat limited role, expanded to include the occasional right to direct the stepdaughter's activities. This right was obtained directly from the stepdaughter.

Boundaries surrounding April's stepfamily seem to have remained much as they were in the beginning. The only obvious difference now is that April no longer attempts to create boundaries around the stepfamily. She seems to have become resigned to her role in the dynamics created by the biological parents.

In summary, from the analysis of three stepmoms' data, it appears that there are three main themes contributing to the development of a mutually satisfactory relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter. These themes appear to pass through four general stages and vary in significance in each stage. How each theme and the interplay between themes is handled influences the course of action in the next stage. Each course of action has different ramifications for the relationships within the stepfamily. Stage IV appears to be the culmination of the evolutionary processes put into action by the introduction of a stepmom into the father's family unit. It is characterized either by the stepmom reaching a satisfactory relationship in accordance with her goals, or by redefining her goals in accordance with the possibilities that have become apparent to her.

Stepmoms Developing Relationships with Their Stepdaughters:

Three Journeys



The Model in Relation to Other Current Research

The current research on stepmother families was described in detail in Chapter II. The major findings are recapped below and then discussed in relationship to the model.

In Santrock and Sitterle's (1987) study they found that remarried fathers:

> had good father-child relationships and carried a fair share of the weight in responding to their children's emotional, social, and physical needs. These fathers felt very positive about their relationship with their children and those feelings were reciprocated by their children. (290)

They go on to state that although "stepmothers felt more confident in the parenting of their stepdaughter" (p. 286) and shared "many of the parental and childrearing activities with their husband(s) (p. 291), they were viewed by their stepchildren as "somewhat detached, unsupportive and uninvolved in their lives" (p. 291); a view the stepmothers also came to share regarding their relationship to their stepchildren.

Clingempeel, Brand, and Ievoli (1984) conducted a study on the relationships between stepparent and stepchild in stepmother and stepfather families. Using scores on Love and Detachment scales, they found that "stepparent-stepdaughter relationships in both stepmother and stepfather families were more problematic than stepparent-stepson relationships" (p. 471).

Clingempeel and Segal (1986) also investigated the quality of stepparent-stepchildren relationships and the stepchild's psychological adjustment. They found that "more positive stepmother-stepchild relationships were associated with better psychological adjustment of

stepchildren of both sexes," however the results were more striking for stepdaughters" (p. 481).

While two of the stepmoms in my study had been married for seven years, and the third for fifteen years, those in the Santrock and Sitterle study and the two Clingempeel studies had been married at the maximum three years. Based on the stages in my study this would place most of these stepfamilies in either the latter half of Stage I or in Stage II. The findings from Santrock and Sitterle (1987) and Clingempeel et al. (1984) would appear to me to be compatible with the process found in my study in Stage I and II. Perhaps these quantitative studies could be thought of as snapshots of the relationships in stepfamilies and as such seem to be confirming the early stages of my model.

Certainly the stepmothers in this present study were similar to the stepmothers in the Santrock and Sitterle (1987) study in that they were all originally highly involved with their stepchildren. In this study, we have no direct information regarding the views of the stepdaughters. However we do have reports from the stepmothers regarding how they thought the stepdaughters were handling the presence of a stepmother. We know that in the early stages of the formation of two of our stepfamilies that the stepdaughters tried to integrate the presence of a stepmother through imaginary play or language. As well, all three of the stepmothers commented on the issue of loyalty for the stepdaughter between the stepmother and the biological mother. It may be that the stepdaughters in the Santrock et al. (1987), Clingempeel et al. (1984), Clingempeel et al. (1986) studies viewed their relationship with their stepmothers in this negative light because they have not yet resolved the loyalty conflicts between themselves, their stepmothers, and their biological mothers. As well it is only in the latter years of the stepfamilies life in this present study

that the stepmothers are able to comment on a mutual loving bond between themselves and their respective stepdaughters. Based on that information, perhaps the stepdaughters in the Santrock et al. and the Clingempeel et al. studies had not had sufficient time to develop a loving relationship with their stepmothers.

Having discussed the model in relationship to the quantitative studies quoted in Chapter II, I would like to briefly comment on the model in relationship to the work of Emily and John Visher, therapists and authors in the area of stepfamilies.

Because the Vishers' findings were based on their case work with stepfamilies, they were not included in the original literature review. However, their work which is described in their books (Stepfamilies: A Guide to Working with Stepparents and Stepchildren, 1979; How to Win as a Stepfamily, 1982; Old Loyalties, New Ties, 1988) has many of the same themes, thoughts, feelings, and issues that are described in Chapter IV of this study. The major difference between the Vishers' work and this study is my identification of stages. These stages appear to identify a structure and a process for the information gathered from stepfamilies. If these stages are validated by future studies, the implication on further research directions and therapeutic interventions could be significant. For example, rather than getting trapped in a presenting issue, such as discipline, or decision-making, the therapist could indicate that relationships evolve in a stepfamily through stages. Having identified which stage a particular stepfamily was in, a therapist could then use his/her knowledge of the themes and how they are represented in each stage to direct a constructive intervention. The direction of further research could be on expanding our knowledge of the stages and their applicability to other types of stepfamilies.

Practical Implications of the Model

One of my underlying hopes for this study was to acquire knowledge that would be useful in a therapeutic setting. It seems to me that the factors identified as being helpful to the integration of a stepmother into a family unit can either be viewed in isolation or considered in the context of family therapy. It is the latter perspective that I would like to discuss here. The purpose of this discussion is to try to identify the family therapy approach that appears best able to integrate the factors in the model, thus providing the therapist with a framework that is more likely to lead to a successful intervention for a stepfamily.

Structural Family Therapy

Of the many family therapy approaches that could be considered, structural family therapy was chosen. Structural family therapy has as a basic theoretical concept the belief that "the whole and the parts can be properly explained only in terms of the relations [emphasis added] that exist between the parts" (Lane, 1970, cited in Aponte , 1981). Throughout the model there is a constant awareness of relationships and the interplay between them. Thus structural therapy, with the emphasis on relationship between the parts, seems especially appropriate here.

Structural therapy has three major dimensions, called boundary, alignment and power. Each of these structural dimensions has symptoms and types of problems, which are classified according to the structural dimension that they most closely represent. The themes in the model seem to relate closely to these dimensions. In the following section, each structural dimension and it's major problem is defined. Then the model's three themes are discussed in relationship to these dimensions.

Boundary. Minuchin (1974), a leading therapist and researcher in the area of structural therapy, states, "the boundaries of a subsystem are the rules defining who participates, and how" (p. 53). Aponte and Van Deusen (1981) elaborated on the role of rules in boundary making in this manner:

> These rules dictate who is in and who is out of an operation and defines the rules those who are in will have vis-a-vis each other and the world outside in carrying out that activity. Furthermore, the various individuals or groupings carrying out the operation (activity) define their own and each other's roles with respect to the operations .... (p. 312)

The family structure problem most often associated with boundaries is called enmeshment and disengagement. Basically, enmeshment and disengagement represent extreme points on a continuum, with healthy functioning being somewhere in the middle. Thus, enmeshment is a point where boundaries are such that "family members function as if they are part of each other" (Aponte & Van Deusen, 1981, p. 314). Disengagement, on the other hand, is where the individual and family boundaries are so rigid that "family members behave as if they have little to do with one another, they tend to go their own ways with little overt dependence on one another" (Aponte & Van Deusen, 1981, p. 314).

Alignment. Alignment is described by Aponte and Van Deusen (1976a) as the "joining or opposition of one member of a system to another in carrying out an operation" (p. 434). Thus within a family the individuals have patterns of working together or in opposition, in relationship to the many tasks that they must perform in a family.

The common types of structural problems associated with this structural dimension are, stable coalition, triangulation and detouring coalition. Aponte and Van Deusen (1981) describes a stable coalition as:

> the joining together of family members against another so that the pattern becomes a dominant, inflexible characteristic of their relationship. The detouring coalition is a form of stable coalition distinguished by its intent to diffuse the stress between the members of a coalition by designating another party as the source of their problem. In triangulation, each of two opposing parties seek to join with the same person against the other, with the third party finding it necessary,.... to cooperate now with one and now with another of those opposing parties. (p. 314)

Power. Aponte and Van Deusen (1981) defines power "as the relative influence of each (family) member on the outcome of an activity. Power is relative to the operation" (p. 313) ... and ... "is generated by the way the family members actively and passively combine, enabling the intention of one or more of the members to prevail" (p. 313). Power is the force by which the other structural dimensions are activated.

> The basic structural problem with power is the lack of functional power in the system: that is for individuals or groups who are not able and/or allowed to exercise the force necessary to carry out functions appropriate to themselves in the system in which they are operating. (Aponte & Van Deusen, 1981, p. 315)

Two examples of lack of functional power are a "weak executive functioning, in which the parents do not have the leverage required to direct their children" (p. 315), and "the inhibition of developmental potential, in which the individual, because of family organization, cannot act in ways appropriate to his/her age within the family" (Aponte & Van Deusen, 1981, p. 315).

One final comment must be made regarding the three structural dimensions noted above. No matter which dimension (boundary, alignment,

power) might predominate in a particular operation, the other two dimensions are likely to be involved, if only in a minor role.

The Model's Themes in Relationship to Structural Family Therapy

How do these structural dimensions and their respective problems relate to the three themes in the model? The reader will recall theme one as the desire on the part of the stepmom to develop a "parent-like" relationship with the stepdaughter. Are there elements of boundary, alignment, and power as defined above, in this theme?

In theme one it appears that the stepmoms are trying to develop a role in relationship to their stepdaughters. Boundaries as defined by Minuchin (1974) consist of the rules regarding who is in a particular subsystem and how those individuals will behave towards one another and the world at large. It seems to me that is exactly what the stepmoms are trying to achieve. First through the behaviors of the "good-mother", and later through their authentic interactions with the stepdaughter, the stepmoms are attempting to create a specific type of relationship with their stepdaughters.

To achieve this role the stepmoms need the father's support and trust, theme two. This is exactly what structural family therapy calls alignment, that is "the joining or opposition of one member of a system to another in carrying out an operation" (Aponte, 1976a, p. 434). For two of the stepmoms in this study the fathers joined with them to help to develop the stepmom/ stepdaughter subsystem. It appears that the third stepmom was opposed in her attempt to create this subsystem.

The third theme, the need to filter the relationship between stepmom and stepdaughter through the biological mother, could be construed as having strong elements of alignment and boundary issues. It seems that the

creation of the stepmom/stepdaughter subsystem occurs between the father, stepmom, and stepdaughter and then through the biological mother. It appears that a strong alignment by the fathers to this subsystem facilitates the progress of that subsystem through the biological mother.

The third dimension, power, did not appear directly as a theme in the model. However, in the data presented in chapter four there is a underlying concern on the part of the stepmoms regarding their ability to achieve change. By Aponte and Van Deusen's definition of power, if one can effect change one has power. Based on that assumption, two of the stepmom's achieved power while the third stepmother, who was denied the changes she desired, was effectively denied power. Interestingly, she chose to respond by developing a relationship to her stepdaughter that she described as a "aunt." This may be interpreted as confirming Aponte's example of a weak executive functioning. If this interpretation is correct then all three of the major dimensions in structural family therapy are present in this model.

Thus, having possibly identified a therapeutic approach that is consistent with the themes in the model, it would seem logical to use the principals of this approach in therapy with stepfamilies. For example, one of the dysfunctional family problems associated with boundaries is enmeshment and disengagement. Within the study, one of the stepmoms talks about the strong bond between father and children, to the point of considering it perhaps too strong. Over time, if the father could not shift his relationship with his children to include the stepmom, this might be considered enmeshment. A therapist could help the stepfamily through this development stage by encouraging the stepmom to bond to her stepchildren through fun activities that did not always include the dad. Simultaneously, the therapist could be helping the dad verbalize his fears regarding the

stepmom/stepchildren relationship, and encouraging him to support and trust the stepmom in her interactions with his children.

It would appear at this point in my research that structural family therapy might be the most advantageous approach to use with stepmother stepfamilies. Further research in the area of stepfamily relationships could be undertaken to confirm whether or not the model dove-tails into more general principles of structural family therapy.

Factors to Be Considered Regarding the Research

At the end of every study, it behooves the researcher to reflect on factors that might have influenced the outcome of the study and to share those reflections with their readers. Therefore I would like to present the following factors that I think might have influenced this research:

1. The length of time that the women in my study had been stepmoms. Two of my participants had been stepmoms for seven years and the third for fifteen years. It is my opinion that this time frame contributed significantly to the emergence of the model.

2. All of the stepmoms were extremely articulate and reflective. These attributes were extremely helpful in obtaining in-depth information.

3. It was my good fortune to have three stepmoms whose stories seemed to represent three different ways of travelling through a similar process. I believe that these differences contributed significantly to the evolution of the model.

4. One of my stepmom had been highly trained in the area of family dynamics. Her background may have had a strong impact on the evolution of the model.

5. All three of my stepmoms were white and come from an upper middle class background. They were also all professional women.

6. Another factor was my own background. I believe that both my counselling skills and my own experience as a stepmom contributed to the level of empathy that developed between myself and the stepmoms. This indirectly influenced the depth of information that was received.

7. Since this was my first qualitative study my skills as a researcher and interviewer were necessarily those of a beginner. I believe this influenced the type of information that was obtained.

On reflection one factor occurred to me that I believe was a limitation of the study. I did not leave the interview contract with the participants open. An open contract would have allowed me to go back to the participants for further information and clarification.

Possible Directions for Future Research

Finally, this study should be viewed as a stepping stone from which a number of possible avenues can be explored. The following are a number of potential research questions:

1. A replication of this study to validate or repudiate the themes and stages identified in my model.

2. A larger quantitative study that is based on questions that have been formulated from the model would be informative.

3. A study that would investigate whether or not these themes and stages are relevant for other types of stepfamilies.

4. A study to ascertain whether or not the themes and stages in my model are really any different than those occurring in an nuclear family.

5. A study of the benefits of the model as applied through structural family therapy to stepfamilies in therapy.

6. An investigation of family therapy approaches to ascertain which might most easily accommodate the themes from the model.

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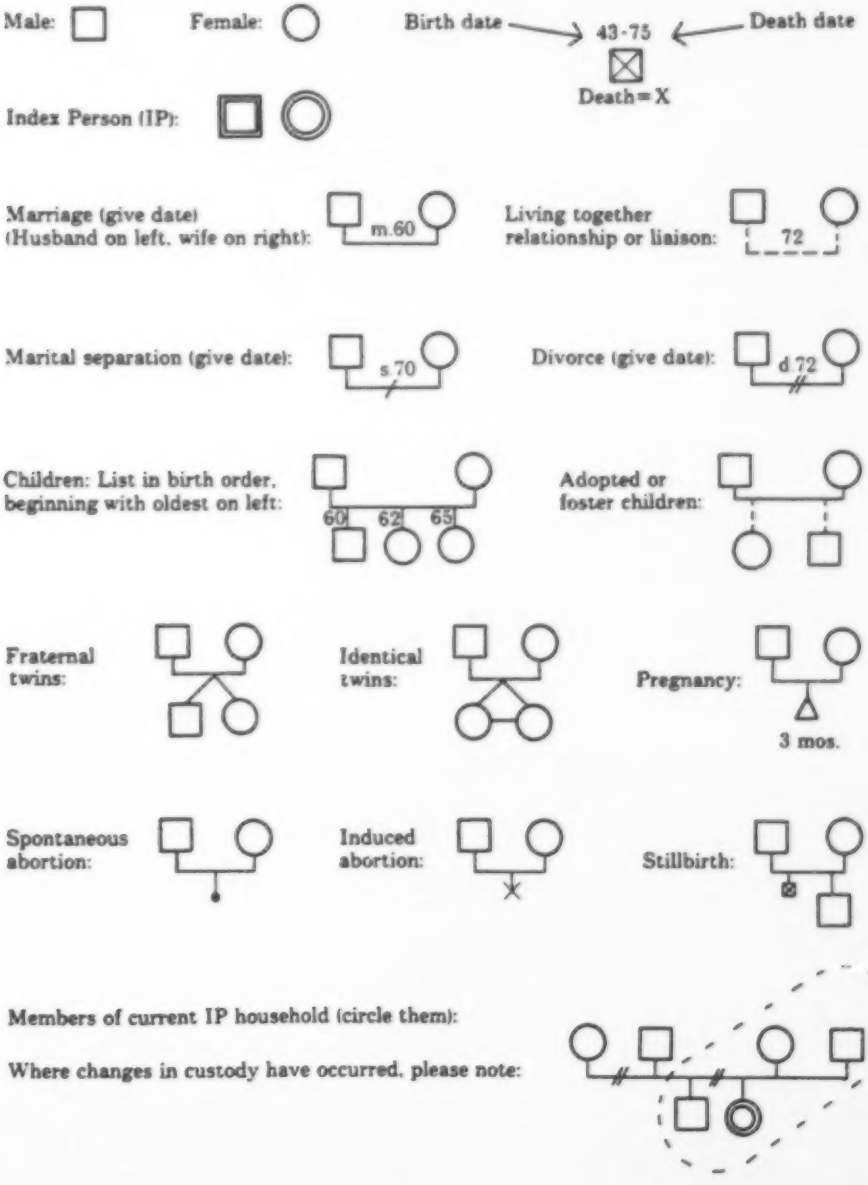
APPENDIX A

SYMBOLS IN GENOGRAMS

A. Symbols to describe basic family membership and structure (include on genogram significant others who lived with or cared for family members – place them on the right side of the genogram with a notation about who they are.)



APPENDIX B

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Stepmother,

My name is Nancy-Ann Fowler and I am presently enrolled in my thesis year of the Masters of Educational Psychology in the area of counseling at the University of Alberta. My research focus is stepfamilies and I am currently developing a study in which I hope to identify those factors that contribute to a mutually suitable steprelationship between stepmothers and stepdaughters.

My study is presently being reviewed by the Department's Ethics Committee, a procedure that occurs with all studies conducted at the University. With approval from that board I will be able to begin my study.

However the study needs the participation of a number of stepmothers. Therefore, I would like to ask you to consider being a member of this study.

In the study you will be asked to reflect on your present and past relationship with your stepdaughter and how that relationship evolved. Because of the reflective nature of this study I would like to interview each stepmother twice. These interviews should take approximately two hours. I would like to tape record these interviews so that they can be typed out later, but I will change any names that you used. I will erase the tapes when the study is finished. If I use quotes from your interviews when writing up the results of the research I will change any identifying features to protect your identity. At any time throughout the study you (the stepmother) may withdraw your consent and terminate your participation in the study.

If you are a stepmother and would like to participate in this study please contact me at home (483-2929) after 5:00 P.M.

Thank you again,

Nancy-Ann Fowler

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of Alberta
Faculty of Graduate Studies
Department of Educational Psychology

Project Title: Stepmothers Perception of their Relationship with Their Stepdaughters
Investigator: Nancy-Ann Fowler
Supervisor: Dr. D.D. Sawatzky

During this research I will be trying to discover from a stepmothers perspective the factors that she believes are necessary to develop a mutually suitable relationship between stepmothers and stepdaughters. I will ask stepmothers to reflect on their present and past relationship with their stepdaughters and how that relationship evolved. Because of the reflective nature of this study I would like to interview each stepmother twice. These interviews should take approximately two hours. I would like to tape record these interviews so that I can type it out later, but I will change any names you use. I will erase the tapes when this study is finished, in the summer of 1992. I will use quotes when I write up the results of this research, but I will use false names to protect your identity. Thank you for your help.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT I, _____, hereby agree to participate in this research project.

I understand that there will be no health risks to me resulting from my participation in the research.

I give permission to be interviewed and for these interviews to be tape-recorded. I understand that once this research is completed, the tapes will be erased. I understand that the information may be published, but my name will not be associated with the research.

I understand that I am free to not answer any specific questions on the Participant Information Form. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time.

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I have, and all questions were answered to my satisfaction.

_____ _____
Participant Researcher

_____
Date